



A Level

Drama and Theatre

Small Island (Andrea Levy, adapted by Helen Edmundson)

About the play

The play centres around the Windrush generation, focusing on the hopes, dreams and experiences of Jamaican migrants and British families post-WWII. It explores identity and social injustice across the 1940s, and the harsh reality faced by colonial migrants compared to the false hope sold to them to encourage them to move to Britain to rebuild the country.

Context

The play explores themes of power, migration, racism, prejudice and hope.

The play was first performed in the Olivier auditorium at the National Theatre on 1 May 2019. The original production included the use of historical footage. Lighting and sound was used to distinguish between key locations and create differing mood and atmosphere to clearly communicate the impact of physical and emotional journeys made by the characters.

Characters

Hortense	A young Jamaican woman who hopes to teach in England. She embodies British pride.
Gilbert	A hopeful young Jamaican man who marries Hortense before facing harsh realities in Britain after travelling on the <i>Empire Windrush</i> .
Queenie	A working-class woman who dreamt of finding romance before her passionless marriage to Bernard. She is Gilbert and Hortense's landlady.
Bernard	Queenie's middle-class husband. He goes to war, eventually returning, bitter and disillusioned.
Arthur	Bernard's father. He suffers from shell shock from fighting in WWI.
Michael	Hortense's cousin. He joins the RAF but later moves to Canada after a brief encounter with Queenie.
Miss Jewel	Hortense's grandmother who instils a belief in her that her light skin tone will offer her great opportunities.
Dorothy	Queenie's aunt who helped her move to London; she encourages Queenie to marry Bernard based on his class.
Mr Phillip and Miss Ma	Michael's parents. Hortense moves to live with them as a child. They are devoutly religious and have strict expectations.

Directing

What type of acting style will be used and how can this be developed in rehearsal? How will you communicate interaction between characters to the audience through proxemics, movement and positioning, and vocal and physical skills?

Live theatre

How have your acting, directing and design ideas been influenced by live theatre you have seen? How can you adapt effective ideas to this play?

Acting

Consider these when approaching the text as an actor:

Acting style: A blend of naturalism and epic theatre techniques such as direct address.

Character motivation: Each character embodies specific motivation in this play. Think about what the motivations are. Do they change throughout the play? When? Why? How are relationships explored differently?

Communicating to the audience:

- **Vocal:** For example, pitch, tone, tempo, pause, volume, emphasis.
- **Physical:** For example, facial expression, gesture, stance, posture, gait, pace, levels.

Design

Consider these when approaching the text as a designer:

Concept: What are your aims and intentions? What are the key themes you want to communicate? What is your production style and chosen time period? All of these decisions will affect the rest of your design.

Performance space: The four main stage styles are proscenium arch, thrust, traverse and in the round. Each have their own advantages and things to think about when creating ideas for set. Think about the role of the audience; should they feel immersed, or as though they are observing from a distance?

Set and props: How will you create locations? What large pieces of set and furniture do you need? Think about the scale, style and colour.

Lighting: For example, types of lanterns, position of lights, colour, intensity.

Sound: For example, live or recorded, diegetic/non-diegetic, use of music including period and style, SFX, soundscape, intensity.

Costume: For example, period, style, colour, material, fit, state.

Hair and makeup: For example, style, colour, impact of makeup.