

Synergy Theatre Project

Teacher Resource Pack



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Synergy Theatre Project

Synergy Theatre Project is a ground breaking company which works in the arena of criminal justice. We aim to aid the rehabilitation and resettlement of prisoners and ex-prisoners, to reduce offending through the training and development of prisoners, ex-prisoners and young people at risk, and to explore issues around crime with young people in mainstream education. The company fulfills these objectives through three main strands of activity - theatre productions (both in prisons and with mixed ex-prisoner and professional casts in theatres and on tour), a new writing programme (play writing courses for prisoners and ex-offenders) and an education programme for young people. In addition, we seek to place wider issues regarding imprisonment and the criminal justice system in the public arena.

The education programme has two main aims:

- To empower young people to make informed choices in situations which may lead to criminal or anti-social behaviour and to encourage responsibility and active citizenship.
- To provide extended training, work experience and employment opportunities for the ex-prisoners, thus supporting their resettlement and rehabilitation and reducing rates of re-offending

Burning Bird by John Donnelly

Cast

Simone James	Daisy
Catherine Nix Collins	Theresa / Jaqui / Miss Lyons
Anil Kumar	Mr Akhtar / Mr Johnson
Debbie Samuel	Bev / Yvonne
Michael Smith	Roy / Morrell

Director Esther Baker

Designer	Katy McPhee
Costume Designer	Sophia Simensky
Sound Designer	Sarah Weltman
Assistant	Jaya Hartlein

Company Stage Manager	Rupert Carlile
Assistant Stage Manager	Ronnie Actil
Assistant Stage Manager	David Frederick

General Manager	Jennie McClure
Education Manager	Kirstin Shirling
Lead Workshop Practitioner	Brian Mullin

Workshop Facilitators	The Company
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Burning Bird is a new play for young people commissioned by Synergy and researched with prisoners and ex-prisoners, including those who were involved in the 2011 London riots.

Note from the Playwright

John Donnelly is an experienced professional playwright with extensive experience teaching and devising creative writing projects for young people as well as teaching playwriting at undergraduate and MA level as a lecturer at Central School of Speech and Drama. He is currently under commission to the Royal Court Theatre, where his first professionally produced play, BONE, appeared in 2004. Since then his plays have been performed at many venues including Theatre 503 (SONGS OF GRACE AND REDEMPTION), the Bush Theatre (THE KNOWLEDGE) and, most recently at the Tricycle Theatre (LITTLE RUSSIANS - First Blast: Proliferation season).

In Joe Penhall's play *Blue/Orange*, two psychiatrists, both white, one middle aged, one younger, argue over the diagnosis of a young black patient – is he eccentric but essentially sane, in which case he can be discharged, freeing up a valuable hospital bed? Or are his delusions the symptoms of a more serious schizophrenia, requiring further treatment at great expense to the taxpayer?

The psychiatrists throw all manner of dirt, accusing each other of racism and of attempting to further their careers at the expense of the patient. And so we watch these two, educated professionals analyse and interpret the behaviour of a vulnerable young man to suit their own agendas – one broadly liberal, one broadly conservative. Rather than use the facts to shape their own perceptions, they mould the facts to suit their prejudices.

The aftermath of the 2011 riots reminded me of this. Kenneth Clarke, then Tory justice secretary, saw the rioters as part of “a feral underclass” and the Daily Mail described their behaviour as “wanton criminality”. Meanwhile, former London mayor Ken Livingstone, along with a large section of my Twitter feed – about as healthy a barometer of well-meaning Guardian reading liberals as you could find – agreed the unrest was a direct result of economic stagnation and Tory welfare cuts.

A kind of ‘confirmation bias’ seemed to be at play – the primary function of the riots seemed to be as a means of confirming whatever prejudice you started with. Were they a sign of a need for stronger legislation to clamp down on a criminal underclass? Or a sign of the extent to which current economic policy has alienated a generation? Both, depending on where you were standing.

It doesn't seem like rocket science to posit some kind of connection between the prohibitive cost of further education, the abolition of the education maintenance allowance, the criminalisation of peaceful protest and the disproportionate effect both of the economic slump and the cuts on the poor of this country, and the eruption of the riots.

Then again, it becomes harder to fathom what connection there is – if any – between the peaceful and dignified demonstration that followed the shooting of Mark Duggan, and the widespread nationwide looting and vandalism that took place the next day.

The riots were, of course, the culmination of a complex series of conditions and events (if you're interested in deeper analysis, The Guardian/LSE 'Reading the Riots' report – <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/series/reading-the-riots> – isn't a bad place to start). People nicked stuff because they were angry about being disregarded by wider society. But also because they were bored. Or because they wanted a new telly. And often these things aren't mutually exclusive.

Burning Bird is not specifically about the Summer 2011 riots. For starters it takes place during term time rather than the school summer holidays. It is about a fictitious fifteen year old girl – Daisy – and how the decisions she makes are shaped by her environment. It is a play about how our society often appears designed specifically to antagonise and thwart the ambition and education of swathes of young people. It is also a play about taking responsibility for our actions as individuals while not neglecting the impact that wider economic trends and decisions made by government have on us as individuals.

Burning Bird is about how there are different versions of the same event – and that the *truth*, for I do believe such a thing exists – is often hard to discern. And while I would discourage you from adopting a reductive blanket cynicism about every word that comes out of the mouth of a politician or a newsreader, I do hope this play might inspire you to ask a basic historian's

question of any such public pronouncement – namely, *what does this person stand to gain by saying this?*

I also hope the play is fun. And funny. I hope that an audience is entertained and even moved. Perhaps moved enough to debate some of the issues it raises – whatever you think those issues might be – and hopefully to argue about decisions the characters take.

Finally, I don't exempt myself from all this. If I were you, I would take this introduction with a healthy pinch of salt. I am, after all, a writer. I tell stories. Why on earth would you believe anything I say? Writing, like acting, is the art of lying well.

So if you watch this play and find yourself enraged by my transparent inability to tell the truth or to render the lives of these characters with any degree of accuracy or skill, I exhort you to write or devise your own better plays instead – and tell your versions.

John Donnelly, October 2012

Note from the Director

Esther Baker is the co-founder and Artistic Director of Synergy Theatre Project. Esther's recent theatre work includes: Glengarry Glen Ross (HMP Brixton), Holloway Jones, winner of the 2012 Brian Way Award (Unicorn Theatre and schools tour), Every Coin (Soho Theatre), Random (Tour), Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train (Trafalgar Studios), Fallout and Elmina's Kitchen (HMP Brixton), The Long Road (Soho Theatre) and a short film, The Rains of Fear (BFI Southbank, LA and Krakow Film Festivals). She has trained and worked at National Theatre Studio.

What is your interest in working with theatre and criminal justice?

I've worked in theatre in the criminal justice system for a long time and have seen the transformative power it can have on prisoners and ex-prisoners and also the audiences that encounter it.

I started teaching in prisons soon after finishing my drama and dance degree, and was pulled in by the impact the work had on the prisoners. I learned to direct by working with prisoners, which was a great way to learn as they are so upfront. I also learned how to manage them in the early years, which is not as easy as it may seem.

Prison is a dynamic and raw place to create theatre as the prisoners are honest, funny and direct; they have made terrible mistakes and are stripped of everything. They bring something to the work that makes it exciting – a truth, danger, vulnerability, physical presence and their life experience. Working with ex-prisoners brings a similar energy to the work but can also involve a lot of chaos as they resettle into life outside.

How has Synergy grown from one thing to another over the years – when and from where did the work with young people evolve?

We started by producing plays in prisons and with ex-prisoners, and in 2004 we were asked by Richmond Borough Police if we would do a play and post-show discussion for their annual crime prevention day for young people. We did this with prisoners out on temporary licence from HMP Latchmere House who performed the play and talked about their own experiences. It had a huge impact on the young people and we were encouraged to develop this area of our work. We started touring an annual play about young people and crime to schools and it has evolved over the last eight years.

What is the thought process behind casting a mix of professional and ex-prisoner actors? What functions does this serve?

The ex-prisoners bring something unique to a project like this. They were once young people, living in inner city London, with immense pressures on them and ended up taken the wrong path. It is powerful to have them perform, talk about the mistakes they made which led them into crime and explore the themes of the play through workshops with the young people. Also they often play the characters very well, bringing a raw truth as they can relate to the parts.

Having professional actors alongside the ex-prisoners is to ensure a high quality performance. The actors bring skills which the ex-prisoners can learn from and often the actors learn a lot from the ex-prisoners too.

How do you decide what issues to commission plays about?

We want these plays to be an intelligent examination of young people and crime and each year we try to look at what the key current issues are and what might be particularly pertinent to them. The content is also dependent on what the writer is interested in. When the riots happened I did think that it would be good for Synergy to respond but in a way that was sophisticated, raising questions rather than trying to provide answers.

How did you feel when you first read the script of *Burning Bird*?

I loved it and was excited by it. I liked the style, the wit, the pathos, the way the dialogue flies off the page. It felt theatrical but contemporary. I liked the fact that it is a broad canvas, not looking at one specific idea but at lots of different perspectives. I knew that it would be interesting for me as a director to work on as there were so many different choices over how to stage it and what the playing style should be. I knew also that both the ex-prisoners and young people who saw the play would really connect with it.

Can you tell us about the unusual style of *Burning bird* - the direct address, the fast pace etc?

I think that the reason John used the technique of direct address, is because he wanted to be able to engage school audiences, draw them in through the story-telling style and keep their interest. For the actors, this style presents quite a challenge as they have to talk directly to the audience and then shift straight into a truthful scene. It's a style that demands work in rehearsal.

Although it's a serious play, it's also very funny. The style gives the play its wit as do the dialogue and some of the situations which occur in the play. The chaos people get themselves into, as we see in our work with ex-prisoners, is sometimes hilarious as well as tragic. I think John has successfully captured the wit of the culture he is writing about but also the vulnerability and destructiveness as well.

What, for you is the most interesting thing you wanted to explore in the play and what have you learnt?

The thing I have drawn from the play and what I have learnt from working with this cast and many previous casts, is that when you destroy something you also damage yourself. In the play there is damage to property, people, relationships and ultimately to Daisy herself. This is expressed powerfully through the symbol of the bird which Daisy has invested so much in and, when she burns it, she is hurting herself at the same time.

Interview with Esther Baker 2012

Burning Bird Plot Synopsis

The story takes place over the course of one day in Daisy's life, a day in which everything changes.

It's her 15th birthday and it begins with frustration. She's not pleased with the gift from her Mum, a faux-leather folder for her university applications. There's no birthday card in the letterbox from her father either...

On her way to school she's made to wait outside the corner shop run by Mr Akhtar, who adheres strictly to his 'One Child at a Time' policy. When she gets in she tussles with him over the 2p which she doesn't have to pay for the things she wants and she leaves fuming.

At school, all the talk is of a shooting that's taken place in North London, with speculation that things will be kicking off throughout the city. Daisy's devoted friend Tyrone thinks that the police are going to impose a curfew. Morell drives by in his flashy car trying to impress her, but she gets in trouble with her teacher for wearing earrings (even though they were a gift from her Dad).

Daisy is only calm during Miss Lyons's class when she gets to make an origami paper crane, but the calm is broken when Mr Johnson tries to confiscate it later in the day. Daisy evades discipline, though, when the curfew is announced and school gets cancelled.

But Daisy doesn't go straight home – instead she drags Tyrone to Catford to find Roy, her absent father. He's not at his flat, but his girlfriend directs the pair to the local pub, The Hawk, where they eventually find him. Roy has completely forgotten his daughter's birthday and makes excuses for why he can't spend time with her (when really he just wants to go to the betting shop). He doesn't even take the paper crane she's made for him.

Daisy is more upset than ever and keeps ignoring texts from her Mum saying to come home. Who should drive up now, but Morell; he offers Daisy a ride down to the retail area to check out the action. Tyrone insists on escorting her. The whole neighbourhood is being looted and Daisy joins Morell in stealing clothes from JD Sports. In the shop, Morell comes very close to getting into a fight with another guy, but backs down.

He won't back down later, though, when they end up in Mr Akhtar's shop trying to buy rum. A stickler for the rules, Mr Akhtar won't sell it without seeing ID. As the tension escalates, Tyrone leaves, Morell gets angrier and eventually kicks Mr Akhtar down to the ground. Daisy, full of anger, too, spits on him when he's down.

As she rides off with Morell, though, she feels bad about all she's done and decides to jump out of his car before he gets too aggressive in propositioning her. She heads for home where she runs into Tyrone. He's saved the crane and gives it back to her – and also reveals that he stole some small items from the store, too.

Daisy's Mum is relieved when she finally gets home, but the day's not yet over. When there's an ominous knock at the door, Mum asks who Daisy's expecting: her Dad? Tyrone? The police? Tension mounts as Mum goes to the door. As Daisy thinks through the actions that have led her to this moment, she sets fire to the crane and watches it burn to ash. Then she turns to face whoever's come to see her.....

The Riots: A Timeline

The following is from Reading the Riots, a report by The Guardian & The London School of Economics:

The riots began as small-scale disorder in Tottenham, north London, on 6 August. What began as a peaceful protest against the police shooting of a local black man, Mark Duggan, two days earlier, turned into more serious violence.

DAY 1 SATURDAY 6 AUGUST - TOTTENHAM

Fewer than 100 people gathered outside the police station in Tottenham about 5pm, requesting to speak with a senior police officer about the Mark Duggan case. Tensions grew and, shortly before 9pm, Duggan's family departed when bottles were thrown and two police cars were set on fire.

For several hours, police lost control of Tottenham High Road as the crowd began starting fires, looting and fighting running battles with police. After midnight, police returned some order to the high street, but were unable to prevent intense looting at Tottenham Hale Retail Park and – two miles west – hundreds of people began looting shops in Wood Green. Police did not bring the looting to an end until dawn.

DAY 2 - SUNDAY 7 AUGUST - LONDON

Disturbances began the following day six miles north of Tottenham, in Enfield. There were initially skirmishes in the town centre, about 7pm, and more serious disorder broke out as night fell. Unlike the previous nights, there were fewer clashes with police, with most of the disorder based around the looting of shops and retail outlets across the borough.

In Brixton in south London, there were similar disturbances following the Brixton Splash music festival. After fighting police, the crowd looted a number of Brixton shops, including a large branch of Currys that was raided for several hours. There were minor outbreaks of disorder elsewhere in London, including Oxford Circus, Hackney and Waltham Forest.

DAY 3 - MONDAY 8 AUGUST – DISORDER SPREADS

The third night of disorder saw one of the most intense 24 hours of civil unrest in recent English history. In London, 22 out of the 32 boroughs would be affected in disturbances the Metropolitan Police described as “unprecedented in the capital's history”. Riots began shortly before 5pm in Hackney, where there were sustained battles against police, before spreading across the capital. Some of the worst affected areas included Clapham Junction, Lewisham, Catford, Peckham, Woolwich, Wembley and Ealing, where Richard Bowes, 68, was critically injured after confronting looters.

The worst of the disorder was in Croydon – the scene of widespread arson, and the place where Trevor Ellis, 28, was shot dead. Meanwhile, the first riots began elsewhere in England. The Midlands, Birmingham, West Bromwich and Nottingham all saw serious unrest. Clashes with police also began in Liverpool. However, there were outbreaks of disorder in dozens of other locations across England, including parts of the Medway in Kent, Thames Valley, Bristol, Leeds and Huddersfield.

DAY 4 - TUESDAY 9 AUGUST – A SHOW OF FORCE

The fourth night saw unprecedented numbers of police in the capital, with 16,000 officers deployed. London was comparatively quiet, with only minor skirmishes. However, rioting continued in other parts of England, including Gloucester, Liverpool, Nottingham and Birmingham, where three men – Haroon Jahan, 21, Shazad Ali, 30, and Abdul Musavir, 31 – were killed while protecting shops. The most widespread disturbances took place in Greater Manchester; clashes with police began in the late afternoon in Salford, followed by intense looting of retail outlets in Manchester city centre.

The Riots: A Perspective

Immediately following the Riots that erupted in cities across the UK in the summer of 2011, all sorts of people weighed in about what had caused them and what they meant. Were they an inarticulate expression of rage and disenfranchisement, sparked by the shooting of Mark Duggan? Or were they a form of 'pure criminality', with the majority of rioters jumping on the bandwagon to 'get free stuff'?

In preparing to write *Burning Bird*, playwright John Donnelly held conversations with inmates at HMP Brixton. Here's a perspective of one of the prisoners he spoke with, which was both involved in the Riots and is now a performer in the play:

The riots started because I think people were fed up with the police taking the mick with the power, the authority basically that they had, that they were being too overpowering... So people kind of rebelled at that... And then when they happened people saw that the police had a blind spot and there was an opportunity for people to basically do what they wanted to do, without the police interfering. And I'm sure it's something that everyone in life has thought of, 'Ah, if there was a complete blackout, I would raid this shop and so on.'

The day when the second riot happened, after Tottenham, in Brixton, I saw people getting free goods, expensive goods, which at that time I didn't really have the funds or the money to get because I was financially dipped. I was broke, let's say. I was struggling to get a job, everything was just difficult for me during that time. So I was thinking, 'Oh yeah, I want this, I want this.' And when I saw the riots happening I saw people putting up pictures of iPads, and Macbooks, and jewellery. So when I saw the opportunity in my area—I got up in the morning, I saw it happened in Lewisham, I went straight to my high street, it's a road full of shops, but I noticed a lot of the shops were closing because they knew it was gonna kick off. So I was one of the first people there. I just done it as an opportunity. It was an opportunity, really. I did have money in a sense, or I could have got money from my parents and things, but personally, me, I didn't have money.

I believe that the unemployed started it and the employed took the opportunity. We were just opportunists, really. A lot of people are using the young guy getting shot by the police as an excuse, but to be honest with you a lot of people didn't know him. It's not like they attended his funeral or anything. They just literally used that as an opportunity to grab a few free goods.

It does feel like the government's trying to make it difficult for us working-class people that are trying to study, trying to get jobs. So a lot of people weren't happy with the way the government was treating the working class. So when they done it, they did have that on their mind. Because to be honest, some of them probably wouldn't have done it if their life was cool and their student life was quite simple, let's say, in terms of money and finance. The working-class were literally put into a pit. Obviously EMA had gone, they took away a lot from students, and they raised the prices for a lot of things as well, like for university. The government were basically saying, 'You have to find your own way out.' And all the business people and the rich people, they were getting all the attention, they were getting all the treats, all the favours. Whereas us working-class people, we were struggling.

When you label someone, self-consciously they become what you've labelled them as. And that's not something that a lot of people have control over. For instance, if someone says, 'You've got a bad temper,' the next time you get in an argument with someone you're bound to lose your temper knowing that people said you've got a bad temper. So when they label young people – young Black people, to be more precise – as thugs, criminals, outlaws, then we'll be like 'Alright, this is what you want us to be? Alright, we're gonna be that.' There was a lot of anger towards this label that they have of us.

But the bad thing about the riots happening is, now every time the police see someone like me they probably have in their heads, 'This guy was probably in the riots.' If they stop and search me and they see my records, 'Yeah this guy was in the riots. He's a rioter. Let's disrespect him a little bit, let's be cheeky, let's laugh at him.' The police have obviously lost more respect than they had for us before. And it wasn't much before, to be honest. It's the labelling. We've just not done any favours for ourselves because we've just added another label: looters, rioters. It's made things a little bit worse and a little bit harder for us as well.

To be honest, there was a point where I regretted it. But when I see the police I don't regret it and I just want to laugh at them. And say, 'You all look like complete clowns. And you think we look like clowns. We took the piss out of you for one day and you're supposed to be the higher ups, you have the authority to grab us and pull our arms until they twist and break up behind our backs. But you were weak. We put you underneath our feet. And we did whatever we wanted to do that day. And it only takes that one day for us to know that we had that power.' So I have half-regret, but half-not.

1. Theatre as Analysis (Brechtian techniques)

'The company acknowledge the audience throughout'
- Opening stage directions, *Burning Bird*

Overview

Playwright Bertolt Brecht advocated for distancing effects in the theatre, ones that would take the audience out of the action at key points to help them think critically about the action being presented.

Burning Bird uses a lot of these techniques, with characters breaking the scene to speak directly to the audience, as well as the use of non-realistic sound effects to remind us that what we're seeing is 'only a play'.

What effect does this have on the story being told? Does this style of theatre take some getting used to? How is it different from a style that presents a more consistent illusion?

A. Scene Titles

Usually we think that a good story should keep us hanging on the edge of our seat, wondering 'What's going to happen next?' Reviews go out of their way to give 'spoiler alerts' so that surprises aren't ruined. But in *Burning Bird* the actors tell us what's about to happen at the start of each scene.

Rather than leaving us in the dark about *what* is about to happen, they may make us pay more attention to *why* and *how* things happen the way they do. Also the titles help to 'frame' the action of the scene, telling us what to pay attention to.

The scene titles in the script are usually introduced by the words 'In which...'. You can use these with your students as a quick way to recap the action of the play:

- 1. Daisy starts her day**
- 2. Daisy tries to buy crisps and a drink but is thwarted due to insufficient funds**
- 3. Daisy makes a paper crane and gets in trouble with one of her teachers**
- 4. Daisy and Tyrone evade... the Inspector**
- 5. Roy's gaff**
- 6. The Hawk**
- 7. Daisy and Morell mash up JD sports and emerge with some quality items**
- 8. Morell won't take no for an answer**
- 9. Tyrone gives Daisy her birthday present**
- 10. Daisy comes home for her tea**

Task:

Hand out these titles or write them on the board. Assign small groups of students to each scene to see if they can remember what it referred to. Get them to list key events in the scene, or maybe even lines they remember.

Once they've fed back, discuss what the titles tell us and what they leave out. For instance, the last one ('Daisy comes home for tea') is ironic: the title sounds like the end of an ordinary day when, in fact, monumental things have happened.

- Which of these titles tell us the most? The least?

Have the students create frozen tableau's that capture the essence of a particular scene, the key events and character dynamics.

Play around with changing the scene titles. How do they change our sense of the event?

- Can you create new titles that tell us what's going on emotionally in each scene? (e.g. 'Daisy is let down by her Dad,' etc.)
- Can you re-title scenes so they're told from another character's perspective – like Tyrone or Mr Akhtar?
- How would a newspaper journalist reporting on the events title them? A police officer?

Redo some of your tableau's to reflect the changed titles and new perspectives.

B. Running Commentary

Throughout the play, the characters break the illusion of the scene to tell something directly to the audience.

Task:

Read an early scene from the script with your class: a good choice might be from Scene 3 at school, with Daisy, Tyrone, Morell and Miss Lyons [Excerpted below].

After reading through, identify which lines should be delivered directly to the other characters and which to the audience. Who speaks to the audience the most?

Maybe after a quick discussion about what each of the characters is thinking but not saying (Tyrone is jealous of Morell and worried about Daisy etc.), re-perform the scene but have the students add in new interjected commentary.

As director, you could clap your hands at key moments and ask the actors to improvise new thoughts. For instance:

MORELL You can come too if you like Miss Lyons. Always welcome to come with me, Miss Lyons.

Director: CLAP! 'What are you thinking Miss Lyons?'

MISS LYONS Who does this boy think he is? Someone needs to take him down a peg!

Etc.

Once they've got the hang of this technique, students could become directors and choose when to clap. You could also involve more students by having some play the actors and some, standing right behind them, play their 'inner thoughts.' When you clap, the inner thoughts deliver their improvised lines to the audience.

This could work for many of the multi-character scenes of conflict within the play, for instance Scene 3 between Daisy and her teacher Mr Johnson, Scene 6 with Daisy and her father in the pub, Scene 7 in JD Sports, or Scene 8 in Mr Akhtar's shop.

Assign different scenes to different small groups and get them to improvise in this way. If they come up with new asides that they like, then they can write them into the scene and perform the new version back to the class. Discuss how the different comments emphasize different aspects of the story.

C. Before and After: What we don't see

A more advanced version, after you've done the commentary, might involve looking at other scenes and exploring what has happened before or after the action shown in the scene, especially from the perspective of a secondary character.

For instance: What kind of day has the teacher been having before he confronts Daisy about her earrings? Is he stressed out? What has Roy been up to before he meets Daisy in the pub, or after he leaves her? Or Mr Akhtar?

It's interesting for the students to explore the 'given circumstances' of these somewhat flawed authority figures and ask how that influences the way they behave to the young people.

Task:

Take the scripted scenes and ask students to add some lines before or after that help us understand the characters motivations. They can do this through improvisation or collaborative writing. For instance:

(New lines) MR JOHNSON (on his mobile): Yes, I know that we've gotten a very bad report from OFSTED. I'm doing the best I can!
(Notices Daisy and her earrings)

(Scripted) MR JOHNSON Miss Davis!

DAISY Hate it when teachers calls me that

Etc.

Example Excerpt for previous Exercise B.

MORELL Hey Daisy, Daisy Duke

DAISY This what he calls me, Daisy Duke. Like in that film – Dukes of Hazzard

MORELL Wanna ride?

TYRONE She got school

MORELL Was I talking to you?

DAISY Where you going?

MORELL Wherever you want

– Vroom Vroom!

DAISY Guns the engine like a bodybuilder flexing a bicep
Everyone staring. All these people, kids, teachers, I see the way they look at me

TYRONE Ain't even his ride, it's uncle's, he owns a second hand car place on the high street

DAISY Like Teresa, sket from the shop, looking all the way down her pointy
nose at me. Don't matter why no one looks at you just so long as they
do. Reasons is small print

– Vroom vroom

DAISY Shall I get in? Shall I not? Go left, go right. Decisions, decisions

TYRONE Come on Daisy, let's go

MORELL You want to hang out with a real man. Not little boy lost there

MISS LYONS Bell's gone Daisy, time for class

MORELL Hello Miss Lyons. How you doing Miss Lyons? Looking fine Miss Lyons

TYRONE That's Miss Lyons, she is quite pretty

MORELL You can come too if you like Miss Lyons. Always welcome to come
with me, Miss Lyons

MISS LYONS Remember your first day here Andre? Year 7? Cause I do. You came crying to
me cause someone made a peanut of your tie

MORELL I ain't no kid no more

MISS LYONS Oh you're a man now?

MORELL That's right, miss, I am. And you best remember that. Later

2. 'Stoplight' Moments: Decisions, decisions (Forum Theatre)

DAISY I see the lights going the other direction start to turn and realise this is it. Our light is about to change. Go left? Or go right?

A. Daisy's Journey

Overview

As Daisy goes through the course of her day, she makes certain choices – which may have the effect of narrowing her options later on, like in a game of chess where the player gets boxed in by all the moves he or she has made throughout the game.

If you haven't done it already, start by working with the students to chart the choices that Daisy makes in the play.

Task:

You can chart them physically on the floor – placing School on one side of the room and Home at the other.

Make signs to represent the other key locations (Roy's flat, the Hawk, JD Sports, Mr Akhtar's shop). While placing the signs around the room to create a 'path,' work with the students to reconstruct Daisy's decisions throughout the day:

- Running out of school
- Not answering Mum's texts
- Going to find Roy
- Getting in Morell's car
- Going into JD Sports
- Taking merchandise
- Going into Mr Akhtar's shop
- Not leaving with Tyrone
- Spitting on Akhtar
- Not going home with Morell – jumps out of car

It might be useful to have some lines of dialogue from the play written out onto slips of paper, which are associated with different moments on the path and can be used to help order the events. Things like:

DAISY Missed calls from my mum, text piling up, RU Ok? Everything alright? Please call me

DAISY I ain't watching nothing on the news. Wanna be part of it, need to do something, be someone

MORELL You getting in or what?

TYRONE Daisy, let's go, this ain't worth it

Etc.

Get volunteers to walk the journey performing a mini-version of the play, using the selected lines. With a bit of practice, this could become a quick performance piece, with groups of students moving from point to point, using lines from the play.

As director, you could control it using a 'remote control' that allows you to rewind the action, pause, fast-forward etc.

B. Alternative Routes

This path that you've made leads Daisy inevitably to the ominous knock at the door that ends the play. Once students have become familiar with the path, present them with an alternative scenario, one that's actually included in the script:

DAISY You won't believe what happens next, he stops at the door and in front of everyone he says to me

ROY Know what, Dais? I'll cancel the other thing. Let's go to the pictures, get out this heat? We'll get some popcorn and all the Coca Cola you want. I'll pay two quid extra so's we get the comfy seats, let's live it up. Only live once, right? And after we'll go Nando's you can have all the Peri Peri in the world and ice-cream and...

DAISY Go on. Why you stopped? Why you stopped?

– It's not what he did Daisy

DAISY Yeah it is

– It ain't

How would the play have gone differently, if Roy had actually spent the day with Daisy? Would she have ended up joining Morell or not?

Task:

Start to play around with the possibility of how different decisions would change the path for Daisy. Have groups adjust the journey based on Roy's new behaviour and see whether the story ends up somewhere else.

You can follow this by asking students to pick other points along the path where they feel the action could be diverted (if she had gone home earlier, if she hadn't entered Mr Akhtar's shop etc.). They can take turns using the 'remote control' to rewind and fast forward the action, then press pause to suggest a new path that would change things.

C. Who's at the door?

This investigation could conclude with a discussion about that knock on the door.

DAISY Maybe it's the police. Maybe it's Tyrone. Maybe its dad finally got his act together, I don't know. I don't know.

Task:

Get the class to vote who they think is at the door, maybe by grouping together based on the candidate they think is most likely. (It could be one of the ones mentioned above, or someone else). Have the groups construct improvisations of Daisy answering the door and explore what kinds of conversations she might have with whoever is there.

3. Authority & Authenticity (Writing and improvisation)

- Whose story is this?
- Cause someone's always in charge
- And you got to ask yourself why they're telling the story

- Opening lines of *Burning Bird*

Overview

John Donnelly has embedded a very interesting moment into his play. During the rioting, girls on the street are approached by a character called the Writer:

WRITER	Could you tell me what this means to you?
GIRL	Who are you?
GIRL 2	Where you from?
WRITER	I'm from a theatre company, we're responding to events
GIRL	What you making a play?
GIRL 2	You write for TV?
WRITER	We're trying to find out what you really think?
GIRL	Done anything I've heard of?
WRITER	I know some people who write for Skins

By putting this moment in the script, Donnelly is reminding us that this is just one representation of this kind of event. There have been other plays about the Riots, and many other plays about the lives of young people – most of them not written by young people. No matter how authentic they are, every piece of playwriting is necessarily going to be selective.

A. Playing with language

Read Scene 7, in which JD Sports gets looted. Talk about how the play captures young people's voices. Do these characters sound like people the students know?

Task:

In pairs or groups have students play with writing in text or BBM-speak. One student writes a BBM message (maybe one that would have been sent by one of the Girls in the extract above, describing what she's witnessing). This gets passed to a partner, who writes the reply, and back and forth.

You will end up with some lively dialogue, full of authentic young people's expressions.

Get students to write their favorite lines up on a big sheet of paper representing the 'Twittersphere' commentary on the events.

Fleshing out the scene

Compare the play with some of the other real voices and perspectives about the Riots, which can be found in the PSHE section of this pack. Ask students what other types of people might have been in and around JD Sports when this was happening: Highly politicized members of the community? Older residents of the neighbourhood? Police officers? The possibilities are endless.

Task:

Use the back-and-forth scriptwriting technique to have the students explore how these other characters might have written to their family and friends over text or phone conversations about what they're seeing.

Task:

Alternatively, you could have the students write automatic monologues. Automatic writing is a technique where a student writes without thinking, not worrying about spelling or what's coming next. They should be instructed to never stop writing and not to take their pen off the paper. It can be helpful to give them an initial prompt like 'You won't believe what's happening...' Whenever they aren't sure what to write, they can just keep repeating this prompt until more new ideas come out.

Staging a Scenic Panorama

Once you've generated a lot of new dialogue and monologue material, you can begin to stage it.

Task:

Have volunteers play out the scripted scene from *Burning Bird* at the centre of the stage, and place other groups of different characters around them, representing other parts of the simultaneous action.

As director, bring the scene to life. Tell the students to act the silently the whole way through, until the spotlight comes to them.

As the spotlight shifts focus from one group to the next, students can use the dialogue and monologue material they've written to create new scenes.

You'll end up with a more 'panoramic' picture of the events. If some of the characters or situations are interesting, students could spin them off into other scenes and storylines – even an original play of their own.

PSHE Resources by Brian Mullin, lead practitioner

Burning Bird raises a lot of issues that are directly related to the PSHE curriculum. You can use these exercises to spin off from the play into a discussion of young people's rights and responsibilities, as well as other topics related to law, authority and social cohesion.

1. Young People and Authority

A. Graffiti Wall

Start off by placing a big sheet of paper on the wall, with the word AUTHORITY written in the centre. Give out marker pens and have students write as many different types of rules that they can think of which attempt to regulate the lives and movements of young people. It might be helpful to think of rules that apply in different *places* (e.g. School, Home, the Streets) – you might even want to do separate sheets for different locations.

The rules should be written as if they were signs that might be put on a wall (e.g. 'One Schoolchild at a Time' or 'No hoods' etc.).

Have students put checks next to rules that they think are legitimate and crosses next to ones that they have problems with.

Pick a few of the most commented-upon rules as subjects for debate. For each rule – especially the most unpopular ones – have the students try to come up with two columns: you might call them Benefits/Disadvantages or Helps/Hurts.

Push students to answer questions like:

- What problems is this rule designed to address?
- Who benefits from it?
- Is anyone hurt by it? How? Is that unfair?

Try to get them to step into the shoes of the rules' supporters, even if they don't necessarily agree. Can they come up with at least 3 potential benefits for each rule?

B. Role Play

Design a situation in which students must present cases pro or con for certain rules. Possible scenarios include:

- A group of concerned residents approach the Council to pass a law regulating young people's behaviour (curfew etc.)
- A group of students petition the school administration to lift an unpopular rule

Try to come up with a variety of situations that require the students to come up with thorough and persuasive cases. Encourage the student playing the 'judge' role to be demanding in his/her cross-examination, playing devil's advocate.

Also, explore the possibility of Compromise: can students think of alternative measures that would address the social problems, while minimizing the hurts/restrictions to young people? Can they come up with measures that both sides could live with?

Once multiple alternatives have been thought up and advocated for, take a vote on the best way forward.

2. Defining the Riots

The Riots of 2011 affected a wide range of people, across different classes, races, ages and occupations – so telling the full story is never an easy matter. Use these exercises to generate deeper discussions about what they meant and how they were represented.

A. Headlines

Hand out the following or write them up on a board. They are the headlines from the major papers after the first day of rioting in London.

A. THE ANARCHY SPREADS:

'To blame the cuts is immoral and cynical. This is criminality pure and simple.'

B. ANARCHY IN THE UK:

PM dashes back as riot terror spreads

C. FLAMING MORONS:

Thugs and Thieves Terrorise Britain's Streets

D. The battle for London:

Full-scale alert as violent riots spread across capital;

Mayor and home secretary return, PM still on holiday

E. Mob rule:

Police and politicians powerless as London burns for a third night and riots spread

F. Riots: The madness spreads

Buildings and vehicles ablaze across capital;

Scores arrested as public told to stay off streets;

Politicians fly home to deal with crisis;

Tweeters warned they face arrest

G. Rule of the Mob:

Send in water cannon to clear streets, May told;

Police lose control of capital;

Gangs run riot from east to west

A. Daily Mail.

B. Star

C. Daily Express

D. Guardian

E. Independent

F. Metro

G. Telegraph

Discussion:

Ask students to identify words that are used more than once in the headlines (e.g. Anarchy, mob). What associations do these words have? Can they think of other words the headline writers might have used?

Which of the headlines is the most emotive? Which is the most neutral?

Have a look at the sub-headlines. What aspects of the situation does each paper choose to highlight? Based on these headlines, do we have a sense of who is responsible for this situation? Is it different from paper to paper?

Other Tasks:

You might try to rank the papers along the spectrum from liberal to conservative, or comparing tabloids and broadsheets – and begin a discussion of media biases.

You may want to compare the images used to accompany these headlines. They can all be found via the following link: <http://www.shortlist.com/home/the-london-rioting-headlines>

More talking points:

Did continuing media coverage fuel the riots? According to the Guardian/LSE Study 'Reading the Riots':

More than 100 of the project's 270 interviewees referred to hearing about the riots via pictures on television news – more than Twitter, texts, Facebook or BBM. Some rioters also said the dramatic nature of the TV coverage tempted them to get involved with the unrest.

“They had maps on the news showing where it had spread to,” said a 22-year-old who clashed with police in Birmingham. “I think they had it red round where it was going off bad and I think, Birmingham, London, I think Manchester ... and I was like, ‘Birmingham?’, and I went straight on the train, like.”

Ask your students when the media’s responsibility to cover major stories can cross into glamourising or sensationalising them? Are there more responsible ways for them to tell these stories? How do video images feed into this?

B. Many Voices

The following are actual quotations from many people affected by the riots in different ways. Each has his or her own opinion on the causes and meaning of them. Hand out the quotes to your students and see if they can make guesses about the speaker’s age, class or occupation.

A. I was passing through Mare Street, [in Hackney, east London] and saw a lot of looting. There was a wide range of people there: young people, mothers, some people who were definitely at uni. I can't say why they were doing it but I think this whole Mark Duggan thing is an excuse. People are using that as an open door to get free stuff.”

B. “You see the rioting yeah? Everything the police have done to us, did to us, was in our heads. That’s what gave everyone their adrenaline to want to fight the police ... It was because of the way they treated us.”

C. “Like the overwhelming majority of youth offenders behind bars, these gang members have one thing in common: no father at home.”

D. “Gangs were at the heart of the protests and have been behind the co-ordinated attacks.”

E. “I don't believe there was much planned gangland activity. I believe there was a lot of angry, very working-class, disillusioned young men that realised 'hang on a minute, it's going off”

F. “What I really noticed that day was that we had control. It felt great. We could do what we wanted to do. We could do as much damage as we can, and we could not be stopped. Normally the police control us. But the law was obeying us, know what I mean?”

G. “All I can tell you is that me, myself and the group I was in, none of us have got jobs, yeah? I been out of work now coming up two years ... and it's just like a depression, man, that you sink into ... I felt like I needed to be there as well to just say 'Look, this is what's gonna happen if there's no jobs offered to us out there.”

H. This is what happens when people don't have anything, when they have their noses constantly rubbed in stuff they can't afford, and they have no reason ever to believe that they will be able to afford it.”

I. “The police should get the water cannon out and use the army if they can't cope...I'm not sure how it will all end. This area will be a target because it is wealthy. The problem is that in this country we live in extremes of rich and poor.”

J. "The police were hanging at the bottom of the road, hundreds of them, waiting for trouble. Their priority was to protect Mare Street ... the banks, the post offices. That's what their priority is. Not us. Taxpayers are supposed to serve and protect the community. It's a joke."

K. “The neighbourhood knew it was all wrong [shooting of Mark Duggan]. But sadly it was the neighbourhood that got trashed.”

L. “This man is a very hard-working guy. We work side by side. He’s a very nice man. I don’t know why they had to burn his shop. This has cost a lot of money. They have damaged a lot of shops around Peckham. This is not good for us. How do we start? Where do we go now? Please, we need government help. We need more cameras on the rioting. There are not enough cameras. I doubt that the police will be able to track down the perpetrators.”

M. "You have a generation of kids now that don't respect their parents or the police. When we were youngsters we were made to have respect for the elders. Now if an older was to slap a youth that kid is going to pick up a hammer."

N. "I think it was opportunism. I can understand why people would riot in Tottenham but here? I just thought it was a chance for them to cause havoc. It's just an excuse."

O. "Growing up here, a lot of young boys, they are constantly harassed and stop and searched. The people, not just young people, they don't like the police. They don't get along with the police. They say the police are no good. They feel like they don't help them. So what was happening, they were just trying to give the police the runaround. Just to piss them off."

P. "This was a mixture of opportunism and probably career criminals as well. Some are just using this opportunity to go out and do what they normally do, living off crime, stealing and taking what they can't afford themselves"

- A. Boy, 17, East London
- B. Rioter, 20, London
- C. *Telegraph* journalist
- D. Prime Minister David Cameron
- E. Man, 21, Salford
- F. Boy, 16, Birmingham
- G. Young man, 22, South London
- H. *Guardian* journalist
- I. Retired woman, West London
- J. Homewoner, 40s, Hackney
- K. Man, Tottenham
- L. Shopkeeper, 50s, Peckham
- M. Man, 40s, Hackney
- N. Girl, 17, Hackney
- O. Girl, 21, Hackney
- P. Police officer, Camden

More tasks:

1. - Group the quotes based on different opinions about the root causes of the riots. What assumptions do each of the speakers make?

2. - Order the statements based on which they agree with most.

3. - Read this statement from the Prime Minister in the week following Riots:

"Irresponsibility. Selfishness. Behaving as if your choices have no consequences. Children without fathers. Schools without discipline. Reward without effort. Crime without punishment. Rights without responsibilities. Communities without control. Some of the worst aspects of human nature tolerated, indulged - sometimes even incentivised - by a state and its agencies that in parts have become literally de-moralised." – David Cameron

-- Do your students agree with Cameron about the causes of the riots? Has he left any out?

-- What might some of the speakers quoted above say to the PM?

4. "There is an easy and predictable path for politicians. It puts the riots down to "criminality" pure and simple. And stops there. It says that to explain is to excuse."
– Labour Leader Ed Milliband

-- Explore the difference between explaining and excusing. When does a statement move from one to the other? Do any of the speakers above lapse into excusing the rioters' behaviour?

3. Responses and Responsibility

“We will tackle the hard core of people who persistently re-offend and blight the lives of their communities. So no-one should doubt this government's determination to be tough on crime and to mount an effective security fight-back.” – David Cameron, 15 August 2011

In the aftermath of the riots, the courts responded with unprecedented swiftness to try and sentence those accused of crimes. According to the *Guardian*, “Rioters receive an average sentence of 16.8 months, making the penalties four and half times longer than the average jail term for similar offences in 2010.”

A. Case Studies

Have your students debate these responses to criminal behaviour during the Riots:

1. A Wandsworth boy, 18, was accused of robbery during the Riots. Wandsworth Council went further: they wanted to evict the boy's mother and sister from their Council Flat.

Council: “We want the strongest possible action to be taken and we feel no shame in doing so. Our housing policy says 'Don't mess around with Wandsworth.’”

Defendant: “I understand there are people who have got to face justice because all this has been madness and savagery, but as a mother, I'm not responsible for my son's actions and they are penalising me.”

RESULT: The boy was jailed for 11 months, but the Council finally allowed family to keep their housing, after receiving ‘a number of specific assurances’ from the mother that ‘allayed our concerns about any repeat of this criminal behaviour.’

2. University student from Kent, daughter from a wealthy family, was charged with driving around a group of boys from SE London, while they looted shops. She claimed that although she was friendly with the boys, they threatened her to drive them and she did it unwillingly.

Judge (to girl and boy): “You both come from loving and supportive homes - of neither of you could it be said that your parents have not provided every advantage they could for you. You both revealed your weaker side to your characters in taking advantage of an escalating situation because you thought you could get away with it and would not be caught.”

Defence: “At the time of the offence, placing what she did against the background of who she is, this was completely out of character. It is not beyond the realms of reason that the way she acted might have been affected by the emotional turmoil she was in.”

RESULT: Girl (20) sentenced to 2 years in prison; boy (17) to one year in young offenders institution.

Discussion Questions:

- Was justice served in each of these cases?
- Should parents be responsible for their children's actions? Up to what age?
- Should background and past history of crime be taken into account?

More Talking Points:

The Director of Public Prosecutions has responded critically to the longer sentences given out for Rioters. He believes that the speed of justice is more a deterrent than an overly long sentence:

“I don't think they [rioters] would have thought: 'Oh well, am I going to get 12 months or 18 months?' I don't think people gamble on the length of sentence, particularly. They gamble on: 'Am I going to get caught? Am I going to get sentenced and sent to prison?' And if the answer is: 'I'm now watching on the television some other people who had been caught 24 hours or 48 hours after they were on the streets with us' – I think that's a very powerful message.” – Keir Starmer, QC

Discussion questions:

- What types of sentences serve as deterrents for criminals?
- Should people "caught up in" the mentality of a Riot serve longer sentences than those who commit the same crimes at other times?

2. Rebuilding the Future

Overview

The official independent commission appointed by the government to respond to the Riots, The Riots Communities and Victims Panel, concluded that the riots were fuelled by a range of factors including:

- a lack of opportunities for young people,
- poor parenting,
- a failure of the justice system to rehabilitate offenders,
- materialism
- suspicion of the police

The Report states: "The key to avoiding future riots is to have communities that work."

Recommendations include:

- fines for schools that fail to teach children to read properly
- earlier and better support for troubled families
- a "youth job promise" to get more young people into work
- primary and secondary schools to "undertake regular assessments of pupils' strength of character"

[*Guardian*, 28 March 2012]

Task:

- Give your students the summary of the Report's assessment:
- Does it focus on the most important causes?
- Do they think the proposed responses will have any effect?
- How can government help to support families?

Creative Exercise:

What proposals would your students suggest for measures that could be taken to improve communities and prevent situations like the Riots from occurring?

- How much should be done by the government?
- How much by local, community organizations?

Have them write their proposals in the form of a Report for public officials.

Further Resources

Full Text of the Riots Communities & Victims Panel Report:
<http://riotspanel.independent.gov.uk/>

'Reading the Riots' by The Guardian & The London School of Economics:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/series/reading-the-riots>

Independent Academic Research Studies (IARS) Youth Voice Journal
- think-tank focusing on community-led solutions to social problems
<http://www.iars.org.uk/content/youth-voice-journal-1>

Young Advisors: Riot Responses
- organisation of young people working alongside community leaders
<http://www.youngadvisors.org.uk/young-advisors-riot-responses>

Synergy Theatre Project can create bespoke workshops and projects for schools, pupil referral units, youth offending teams and young offenders institutions.
If you would be interested in working with the company, please contact the Education Manager on 0208 237 1177 or info@synergytheatreproject.co.uk



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