

RSC

ROYAL
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY

NOUGHTS & CROSSES

ADAPTED AND DIRECTED BY DOMINIC COOKE
FROM THE NOVEL BY MALORIE BLACKMAN

Activities Pack

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Introduction

The activities in this pack are based on the novel *Noughts & Crosses* by Malorie Blackman. The book has been adapted for the stage by Dominic Cooke. There are some differences between the novel and the stage version but this pack will give you a good understanding of both. We have kept Malorie's convention of capitalising 'Cross' but not 'nought'.

The RSC production, directed by Dominic, plays in Stratford until 2 February 2008, and then tours the UK until 5 April 2008.

Noughts & Crosses tells the story of two young people: a girl called Sephy and a boy called Callum. Callum is a nought – he's white, from a poor family and lives on a rough estate. Sephy is a Cross – she's black, from a wealthy, powerful family and lives in a grand country house with a private beach.

The exercises that follow are practical activities designed to enable your group to work as an ensemble. They can be used by you with your group in any large, clear space. The most suitable Key Stage for the material is 3 to 4, although most of them would work from Key Stages 2 to 5.

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We encourage you to experience these activities and more in an RSC workshop where you'll learn how to use these techniques with your group.

For more information on our events, courses and workshops, please visit:

www.rsc.org.uk/education

What is story theatre?

The RSC's production of *Noughts & Crosses* uses a theatre convention sometimes referred to as **story theatre**. Generally speaking, story theatre has the following characteristics:

- Characters **stand back and comment** on the action as well as take part in it. They share their thoughts and feelings, comment on events, provide transitional information from one episode to another, and help to cover the expository material handled in the novel's narrative.
- Story theatre is often highly **episodic**, the action taking place in a variety of places in the course of many scenes.
- Partly for that reason, story theatre uses **very little set** and **few props** which will be carefully selected or designed. With the help of the characters' commentary and minimal set design the action can proceed quickly, without any elaborate, time-consuming set changes.
- The acting is often quite **physical**, using symbolic actions to convey a sense of place, atmosphere, time or event. For example, a row of actors' backs may form a wall or chairs slammed in unison may indicate the angry conclusion of a scene. A fight may take place using only red fabric twisted and turned in various ways between the combatants. When actions are used symbolically these are usually quite stylised rather than naturalistic as we would expect in films. In story theatre, both stylised and naturalistic acting may be employed.
- Although props and set elements are minimal, **lighting and sound** may be important features of a production using the techniques of story theatre. Electronically-produced sound may be used alongside more actor-based approaches such as using set elements or simple props to make sound or the actors making the sound themselves.
- In the context of story theatre, audience members are regularly reminded that they are **witnessing a theatre production and not real life**. They are often called upon to use their **imaginations** and the experience of the production is truly **collaborative**.

Exploring adaptation

Examples of the 'story theatre' style are evident in *Noughts & Crosses*.

The following exercises allow the players to:

- Physically explore story theatre
- Investigate the benefits and drawbacks of the genre
- Analyse how using this style can affect the audience's perception of the characters

- **Echoing picture words**
Ask the group to close their eyes while you read Chapter 7 of the novel which corresponds to Act 1 Scene 4 of the adaptation. When you read it a second time, ask them to echo any word which creates a picture in their mind. Afterwards, ask them to write down a few of these. Discuss their first thoughts about how such pictures could be created on stage.

- **Responding to objects**
Before the session, select five or six interesting objects from your home or workplace. Place these around the edges of the room. Ask your group to form pairs or small groups. They then visit each of the objects and share with their partner or group the responses they elicit. Do they draw out memories of a past event or inspire a daydream? Bring the group back together and ask them to be specific about the kind of things the objects inspired.

- **Creating a genre graffiti wall**
Ask the group to read Chapter 7 and the passage from Chapter 32 which corresponds to Scene 12. Then ask them to read the edited scenes on pages 9 and 10. Ask them to make a graffiti wall (on a white board or a flipchart using pens or sticky-notes) of all the differences they find between the novel extracts and the play-script. What do they find in the script that the novel doesn't have, and vice versa? What differences are there between their appearances on the page? Is there information in one which is missing in the other? What tools in the script does the dramatic adaptation use that the novel doesn't?

- **Creating the shopping centre**
Ask the group to imagine they are going to create a shopping centre for a production working within the story theatre convention. How will they create the spirit and atmosphere of a busy shopping centre with only one or two kinds of props (they may use multiples of these) and two or three pieces of furniture? They may, of course, use actors, lighting and sound. How do these designs differ from the way they would approach the same challenge for a feature film?

- **Recounting the story**
Ask the group to recount the story of the school 'Blankers' incident first from Sephy's and then from Callum's point of view. You, as leader, begin with one sentence, and then ask one of the group to continue with another sentence or two. Continue around the group until the whole story is told from the particular character's perspective.

Exploring Act 1 Sc 12

Every character in *Noughts & Crosses* is judged by their status within their society. The following activities explore:

- Status and its meaning in society
- Perceptions on what it means to 'be someone'
- An individual's ability to make significant changes in the world

Before beginning these exercises, watch Act 1 Scene 12 with your group at www.rsc.org.uk/explore and then read through the script (see page 10).

Status Walks

Ask the group to walk around the room in different directions, ensuring that they keep the empty space covered. Explain that you will call out a number from 1 to 5. 1 is lowest status and 5 the highest. They must continue to walk but with a status which relates to the given number.

Now give a context for each status:

- ① A person who is ashamed of who they are
- ② A child who tries not to be noticed in school
- ③ A mother who fears for her family
- ④ A Head Teacher scolding a pupil
- ⑤ A Prime Minister giving a speech

Ask the group to each choose one particular status they have tried and then give them actions to perform in that status. For example:

- Walk across the room to look at something on the wall
- Greet someone with the eyes only
- Greet someone and ask them about their plans for later

After this activity, explore the following questions:

- How did your status affect the way you did these actions?
- What type of character did you become as you experimented?
- How can the use of status help in a dramatic context?

And then referring back to the video clip you watched:

- How did Callum & Lynette's body postures help to inform you of their statuses?
- What does that tell you about the type of people they are?

Activities continue over the page →

Exploring Act 1 Sc 12

→ *Activities continued...*

'Someone' Avatar

Ask a volunteer to lie on a large sheet of paper with his arms out to the sides. Have another volunteer draw around the outline of his body. Explain that this is now the avatar who is about to become 'Someone'.

Ask the group: "What does it mean to be someone?"

Then ask them to write their answers inside the outline of the avatar's body, exhausting all the possibilities.

Discuss their answers. You might ask:

- How does being someone relate to a person's status?
- Can anyone be 'someone'?
- Why do you think Callum chose "being someone" over "making a difference?"

Graffiti Wall

Hang two large sheets of paper on the wall. Entitle one: "If I Could Change One Thing" and the other "The Difference I Made".

Prompt the group to imagine that they were able to change one thing to make the world a better place. Instruct them to write that one thing on the "If I Could Change One Thing" wall.

Next ask them to imagine their change had been made. Instruct the group to write on "The Difference I Made" sheet, explaining how their change made a difference in the world.

Invite the group to discuss the exercise. Pose questions such as:

- Do you have to have money to make a difference?
- With regards to the play, do you think Lynette may have reacted in another way if Callum had chosen to 'make a difference' over 'being someone'?

Exploring parallel issues

Noughts & Crosses has many similarities to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Using the 'Parallel Issues' information below, briefly discuss the issues which arise in both plays:

- **Prejudice** - Both families dislike the other because of what they represent. For example, the noughts were seen as 'the unworthy underclass'; the Crosses as 'the snooty upper-class'. The Montagues and Capulets both represent the enemy to the other family because of a past feud between the two.
Connected to this idea is the question: Can anyone become a 'someone'?
- **Stereotypes** - Some members of the Capulets/Montagues and noughts/Crosses do not know one another personally, yet still dislike one another. This is because they have generalised and put everyone in the same category.
- **Difficult decisions** - Many difficult decisions have to be made. Both Romeo and Juliet decided to go against their families' wishes and pursue a life of happiness together. Equally Sephy and Callum decided to defy their parents by continuing to meet one another.

Now try the following activity:

- **Animated tableaux**
Split the group into smaller groups of four to six. Using the text scraps below, ask the groups to choose two key words from each sentence which they think sum up the meaning of the line. For example, 'Dagger' & 'Friend'.

Prejudice

"He was with his Dagger Friend"

Stereotypes

"Everyone knows they're all muggers and they hang around in gangs"

Difficult Decisions

"How should I answer? Think! Think!"

This activity continues on the next page →

Exploring parallel issues

→ *Activity continues*

Now tell the groups that you would like them each to create three **five second pieces** of drama, one for each of the sentences (or two words). So each small group is working towards creating 15 seconds of action based on six words. They are allowed to speak but only allowed to use the two words they have chosen.

Each small group will **perform for the whole group**. Choose one group to freeze at the end of their performance. Instruct the players that when you put your hand on their shoulder they will say what their character is thinking (in first person). **Ask questions** to the characters about their role in the group and their feelings towards the other characters. Invite questions from the rest of the group.

Now ask all the groups to incorporate the entire line of text into their brief scenes. Also tell them they must add slow, exaggerated movement to the scene so that it becomes stylised. They are permitted to lengthen their scenes to **ten seconds** each line but no more. Encourage them to work as an ensemble.

Next, instruct the players to find **movements** which will allow them to **change from one image to the next**. These moves should be smooth, flawless and carried out in a synchronised manner. They should now have three lines of dialogue with gestures linked together by transitory movements.

Each group then presents their work back to the whole group. Discuss the following:

- What difference did **adding movement** make to the effect of the scenes?
- Which **performance style** was more powerful and why?
- What **choices** did the players make when deciding on the linking movements and why?

Act 1 Sc 4 (edited)

AT THE BEACH

SEPHY Callum don't look at me like that. I said I'm sorry.

CALLUM I know.

SEPHY It's just a word.

CALLUM Just a word! If you slapped me or kicked me or punched me or even stabbed me it would've stopped hurting sooner or later. But I'll never forget what you called me, Sephy. Never.

SEPHY I didn't mean it. I didn't mean you. I was trying to help.

CALLUM Promise me something.

SEPHY Anything.

CALLUM Promise me that you'll never use that word again.

SEPHY I promise. Why did I say that word? It was as if I was outside myself. More and more I was beginning to feel like a spectator in my own life. I had to decide what kind of friend Callum was going to be to me.

Act 1 Sc 12 (edited)

CALLUM'S BEDROOM

- LYNETTE How do you do it, Callum?
- CALLUM Do what?
- LYNETTE Keep going.
- CALLUM I suppose because I know what I want.
- LYNETTE Which is?
- CALLUM To be someone. To make a difference, I guess.
- LYNETTE Which means more to you?
Being someone or making a difference?
- CALLUM I don't know. Being someone I guess. Having a large house and money in the bank and not needing to work and being respected wherever I go. When I'm educated and I've got my own business there won't be a single person in the world who'll be able to look down on me – nought or Cross.
- LYNETTE Being someone, eh? I would've put money on you choosing the other one!
- CALLUM What's the point in making a difference if you've got nothing to show for it personally, if there's not even any money in it?
- LYNETTE You've always been so focussed. You've always known exactly where you want to end up. I hope it works out for you.