

Connections is the National Theatre's annual nationwide youth theatre festival; a celebration of new writings, partnership and, above all, young people. As we begin to see the long-term impacts of the pandemic, it's clear that access to the arts, and through this giving young people agency and a voice, is more important than ever. Every year Connections gives youth theatres and school theatre the unique opportunity to stage new plays written specifically for young people, by some of the most exciting playwrights writing today, and to perform them in leading theatres across the UK.

New plays are at the heart of Connections – stories for and about young people, which challenge them to experience life in someone else's shoes, and transport them to different times, places and emotional landscapes. Through our 2022 portfolio, a young person might journey to 1930s East London to explore the fight against fascism, to South Asia to learn about a thousand-year-old epic tale, or into stories about the struggle to protect the future of our planet. We are proud that these plays continue to have a life as part of a repertoire permanently available to schools, colleges and youth theatres.

At the beginning of their rehearsal process, companies take part in the Connections Directors' Weekend – an opportunity for the directors to work with the playwright of their chosen play and a leading theatre director. Notes from these workshops accompany the plays in this anthology, giving an insight into the playwrights' intentions, creative inspiration and practical suggestions for exploring the text.

In 2022, over 250 companies from across the UK will take up the challenge of staging a brand-new Connections play, with nearly 6,000 young people, aged 13–19, involved in every aspect of theatre-making. It's amazing that in these incredibly challenging times for schools and theatres, Connections can still offer a space to create, to explore contemporary issues and to connect with other young theatre-makers.

Connections is not just the National Theatre's programme: it is run in collaboration with fantastic theatres across the UK who are equally passionate about youth theatre. Our Partner Theatres work with every company to develop and transfer their production, and we hope the festivals will celebrate the brilliant work that has been created, and the power of theatre in these challenging times.

We hope you enjoy this year's plays and we look forward to next year and many years to come.

*Kirsten Adam*  
*Connections Producer*  
*November 2021*

## Introduction

Here are ten plays with something to say. Written by writers with a burning desire to move their audiences to act, both on and off the stage. Propelled by the twin engines of curiosity and speculation, humming to the rhythm of the ever-pertinent questions – who are we now and is it who we want to be? These plays land at a time when the cultural landscape is brimming with possibility.

Connections is about engaging with the real world by diving into an imagined world. Each of these plays is a passport to play, explore, consider, rethink and expand the universe of each and everyone who comes into contact with it – be it as performer, director, parent/carer of a performer or audience member.

All of these plays are about people. People we know or recognise, or might be, either now or in the future. Combined, these plays are about climate change, alternative narratives, sex, protest, loyalty, lies, honesty, hope, resilience, justice, collectivism, individualism, relationships, allyship, communication, division, unity, commonality and choice.

All of them are exciting as they seek to enlighten. They urge awareness, to see the possibilities and then summon the courage to fulfil the potential presented by these possibilities. It's in our hands.

*Ola Animashawun*  
November 2021

## A note on casting

At National Theatre Connections we think long and hard about every play that we put into the portfolio. The writers whose plays make up our portfolios offer their plays as stories about humanity, and we want the plays to be for everyone, and to tell stories about a wide range of experiences, from around the world. We are proud to continue to offer plays that challenge young people to experience life in someone else's shoes, and transport them to different times, places and emotional landscapes.

We encourage our playwrights to keep the casting options for their plays as open as possible. For all plays in the portfolio, all parts can be played by D/deaf and disabled performers and, apart from where the playwright states otherwise, by actors of any gender or ethnicity. If your group doesn't exactly match the apparent casting requirements of a play in terms of race, ethnicity or gender, and you would like to produce it, we would still encourage you to do so.

Where locations are specified, rather than being preoccupied with accents, we recommend focussing your energies on finding the emotional truth of these settings.

## Synopses

### *Cable Street by Lisa Goldman*

**Cast size: a minimum of 12 performers, for 20 speaking roles plus chorus**  
**Recommended for ages 14+**

*Cable Street* is about two girls growing up in London's Jewish East End in the 1930s. Leah and Kitty are blood sisters, best friends and more – but they get caught up in the political turmoil caused by Oswald Mosley's fascist Blackshirts.

At the iconic Battle of Cable Street in 1936, 100,000 working-class people come together to defend the Jewish East End of London from fascists attempting to march through and intimidate the local community. Resulting in a pitched battle fought on two fronts by the 'people' as they took on both the fascists and their police protectorate.

Kitty and Leah are torn apart politically, their love for each other ensnared, like a rabbit in a trap. As their passion and the political tensions grow stronger and stronger, pulling each of them every which way, the snare can only get tighter and tighter until something snaps.

Content warning: this play includes some examples of characters using antisemitic language/stereotypes.

### Chat Back by David Judge

**Cast size:** minimum of 12, with 12 named characters plus a narrator and chorus  
**Recommended for ages** 15+

*Chat Back* is about the underclass – all those young people who are so ‘bad’, disempowered, alienated, ostracised and abandoned that even on the last day of school they still find themselves in detention. We watch a snapshot of the lives of each individual (across a summer holiday of Friday and Saturday nights and Sunday mornings) as they negotiate their way around the obstacles en route to discovering their identity, their economic power or lack of, their lyrical dexterity or lack of, and the meaning of their lives, revealed through their desires, hopes and fears. The words in this play come thick and fast, in rhythm and rhyme, energised and unwavering in its intention to talk truth to power.

Content warning: one reference to suicide.

### Find a Partner! by Miriam Battye

**Cast size:** 13 to 30, minimum 6 male/7 female characters

**Most suitable for ages** 14+

*Find a Partner!* is about the sometimes catastrophic methods we use to find that elusive thing, love. This is *Love Island* scrutinised through a *Black Mirror*-style lens as a group of young people compete to publicly couple up and fall in love forever, or die – quite literally. Facilitated by a group of ‘influencers’ the group sign up to the ‘game’ while the rest of us watch, enthralled, judging and commenting the whole time, as the play asks the questions: what does it really mean to love someone, does it have to be forever and does it have to be only one person?

### Hunt by Fionnuala Kennedy

**Cast size:** 10

**Recommended age:** 14+

*Hunt* is about a group of Belfast teenagers playing their version of hide and seek. Their version entails ‘borrowing’ objects from their neighbours’ back gardens, and dumping them at the ‘box’ without being caught, by either the official pursuers or the neighbours whose gardens they are infringing upon – hence the chances of being caught are twofold. The more outlandish and extraordinary the object and the more difficult to acquire it is, the more kudos you score. The thing is, nearly all of these teenagers are far too old to play this kids’ game, and it’s February, it’s freezing and there’s a storm coming. But Jo wants to impress James, the boy from her new school; he’s not from round here and she’s not from round there. Their fledgling relationship represents a bridge across a class divide. So begrudgingly the band gets back together, for one last game. However, this could be the worst decision of their tiny lives as, little do they know, the rumours about the strange, predatory ‘Man in the Van’ are true – and the even

more strange, dangerous one everyone has been warned to stay away from, ‘Mad’ Danielle, is back on the block. This is a hunt they will never forget.

### Like There’s No Tomorrow, created by the Belgrade Young Company with Justine Thermen, Claire Procter and Liz Mytton

**Cast size:** 10–16, plus additional ensemble members

There are 8 named characters in the play, and a minimum of 2 additional company members are required to cover the chorus roles – making a minimum company of 10.

The number of company members playing chorus roles could be increased to 8 – making a maximum company of 16 with reasonable speaking roles. There is also the possibility of including a further 8–12 company members in non-speaking, or little-speaking, roles, delivering the movement sequences in the city, the scene changes and the bringing to life of the folk tale in Scene Three.  
**Recommended for ages** 13+

*Like There’s No Tomorrow* is about climate change. Set in an imagined city now, the people are choking on the fumes from the cars and the factories, produced by the slavish commitment of the masses to mass consumerism and mass consumption, and yet they still vote for more and more – more cheap clothes, more cheap travel and more disposable goods in a fast ephemeral life. It seems only one or two people can see through this non-sustainable madness, but when they open their mouths to speak out, they cannot be heard; their words are strangled in their throats as they choke on the poisonous fumes they are forced to inhale and, besides, no one can hear them above the cacophony created by the wheels of the global economy grinding against each other. Even when the evidence of imminent climate disaster across the globe is staring them in the face, as presented as the world literally cracking up before their very eyes, still no one wants to listen; they just want to carry on consuming, like they have always have and always will – won’t they?

### The Ramayana Reset by Ayesha Menon, with choreography by Hofesh Shechter

**Cast size:** minimum of 12, no maximum  
**Suitable for ages** 13+

*The Ramayana Reset* is about Zara, a young teenage woman who has a decision to make: to like or not to like the latest Instagram post by her friendship group; a post about the new girl, who happens to be Zara’s best friend from primary school. It’s a dilemma and all she has to help her decide is a book. However, this is no ordinary book, it is the *Ramayana*, the epic story of Sita and Ram, which is a traditional South Asian story, fundamental to the Hindu faith, dating back to two and a half thousand years ago. This is an epic adventure story featuring gods, demons, queens, sorcery, a giant half-monkey half-man taller than the tallest mountain and a ten-headed evil tyrant. This is a piece of dance drama, using movement inspired by the award-winning and

internationally renowned choreographer Hofesh Shechter. This is a BIG story that fills the stage with action – there are fires, battles, trials and weapons powerful enough to end the universe. But most importantly of all there is love (and loyalty)?

#### **Remote by Stef Smith**

**Cast size: 9 to 30**  
**Suitable for ages 13+**

Antler steps out of her front door and throws her phone on the ground. She stamps on it. She then climbs the tallest tree in the park. She doesn't want to be found, not by anyone. Seven teenagers' lives intertwine over the course of a single evening as they make their way through the park on a seemingly normal autumn's night. *Remote* is a play about protest, power and protecting yourself.

#### **Superglue by Timi Crouch**

**Cast size: 8 young performers. 1 male, 1 female – and 6 of any gender.**

The play also requires 8 older/elderly people who correspond with the gender and ethnicity of each young performer. This could be the young people's grandparents or great-aunts/uncles but a family relationship is not essential. Ideally, they are aged over 70. One of these older actors will be required to read a speech at the end of the play.

**Recommended for ages 14+**

*Superglue* tells the story of a group of climate activists gathering at a woodland burial ground to say goodbye to a friend who died during a protest. As they gather, they erect banners and they talk about their pasts and their futures, about peaceful action versus violent action, about how society dismisses them and undervalues their cause. Initially, we believe these activists are the age of the actors playing them. Gradually, we realise that this is the story of an elderly climate action group – elderly characters performed without imitation by young actors. Parallels are drawn between old age and adolescence in a play that gently invites an intergenerational understanding of the future of our planet.

#### **Variations by Katie Hins**

**Cast size: 13**  
**Recommended for ages 13+**

Thirteen-year-old Alice wishes her life was completely different. She wakes up one morning to find that her life is different. In fact, it's so different that all she wants to do is get back to normality. But how does she do that? A play about family, string theory and breakfast.

**You don't need to make a Big Song and Dance out of it**  
**by Abbey Wright, Shireen Mula and Matt Regan, in association**  
**with Tackroom Theatre**

**Cast size: minimum of 8, no maximum**  
**Recommended for ages 15+**

*You don't need to make a Big Song and Dance out of it* is about young people's attitudes towards, experiences of, access to, feelings about and opinions on pornography, love and connection. Taken from the actual words drawn from interviews of 10,000 young people from across the UK, this is a verbatim musical that tries to simply be honest and out in the open about what is often considered to be a taboo subject. No sensation, no fuss, just the plain and simple truth – set to a collection of catchy tunes.

**Content warning:** this play explores young people's opinions on pornography, and includes references to a number of pornographic genres.

**Lisa Goldman** is a writer, dramaturg and director. Her NT Connections play *Cable Street* is now in development with BFI as a feature film. Other plays include *Remedy* (Attachment National Studio 2022) and *Hoxton Story* (2005). Her first short story 'Easy Peelers' was published last year in *Mainstream* anthology (2021). Her children's novel was shortlisted for Penguin Write Now 2020.

Lisa is author of *The No Rules Handbook for Writers* (Bloomsbury Oberon) and runs a script consultancy. The plays she has developed have won or been listed for every UK playwrighting award. Lisa has worked in seventeen countries (including Iran, Turkey and Brazil). She has designed and taught MA modules in writing and dramaturgy at Essex University; RADA; City, University of London and UAL.

Lisa was Artistic Director and joint Chief Executive of the Red Room (1995–2006) and Soho Theatre (2006–10). In 1995 she created the theatre for new work above the Lion and Unicorn. She has developed and directed dozens of acclaimed UK premieres including at Soho Theatre: *Baghdad Wedding* (also BBC Radio 3 Sunday play); *Piranha Heights*; *Leaves of Glass*; *Shraddha*; *This Isn't Romance* (also BBC Radio 3 The Wire); *Poor Polish Speaking Romanians* (co-translated with Paul Sirett); *Everything Must Go*; *Playing Fields*. At Live Theatre: *Inheritance*. At Bush and Traverse and international tour: *The Bogus Woman* (also BBC Radio 4 Saturday Play); *Bites*; *Stitching* (Producer). At Coventry Belgrade: *Behud*; At BAC: *Made in England*; *Sunspots*; *Obsession*; *Surfing*; *Ex*; *Seeing Red*. At Theatre Royal Stratford East: *Dangerous Lady*.

## Setting

Shabby, recycled/transformable furniture and props from the 'barricade' used for scenes as needed. Four time periods in the play: 1931 (thirty minutes), 1934 (three months), 1936 (three weeks), 1939 (thirty minutes). Titles giving time/place can be realised as you like – may not be needed.

## Music

Be authentic and creative – whatever that means to you. I have occasionally suggested songs from *Music is the Most Beautiful Language in the World – Yiddisher Jazz in London's East End 1920s to 1950s* for mood. A pianist could play Dad (who accompanies silent films at the local 'pictures'). Mix old and new music, live and recorded. Do what you like.

## Casting

Casting can be based on rightness for character rather than *actual* heritage. Physical description of Billy should also not sway casting. Kitty's ill children and baby can be represented simply, e.g. by stuffed children's clothes or big dolls. Little Jack's line can be played by whoever does the best child's voice.

## Warnings

The play contains a few intimate and violent moments.

Antisemitic sentiments are expressed in the play by fascists and their sympathisers.

## Performance/Text notes

In 'Chorus' sections, lines are mostly played by individual characters as indicated. Emphasise clear phrases, storytelling and passing on the narrative to the next actor. Where indicated, lines are also spoken by the whole Chorus in unison.

Don't ignore stage directions as they represent important story beats. But do feel free to determine your own physical staging.

A slash mark / indicates where the character speaking next begins their line over previous line.

## Research

<http://www.cablestreet.uk/> helpfully covers all of the main political contexts and events referred to in the play and there are useful interviews with people who were there.

## Big thanks to

Oiffy Films for kick-starting this process

Ola Animashawun for commissioning *Cable Street* and for your wise feedback

My ancestors, for your stories. You were at my shoulder when I wrote this play but particularly Dad (Mischa Goldman). Let beignels be beignels! Thanks to John, Muz and Donna for early feedback.

Dan and Denise Jones of Cable Street for oral history archive and references.

The wonderful team at NT Connections led by producer Kirsten Adam; the National Studio for letting me use a writer's room; Nathan Crossan-Smith, Toby Clarke, Nina Steiger and Stewart Pringle for feedback; the brilliant young actors who did a Zoom read and workshops; Audrey Sheffield for the Directors' Weekend workshop. All the directors and actors who choose to perform *Cable Street*.

## Casting/Characters

Minimum twelve performers with creative doubling – there are twenty-three speaking roles plus Chorus.

**Leah 3 – nineteen**

*Working class. Polish, Jewish heritage, nurse*

**Kitty 3 – nineteen**

*Working class. Irish heritage, long facial scar*

**Leah 2 – fourteen & sixteen**

*Stubborn, smart, playful – grows in confidence*

**Kitty 2 – fourteen & sixteen**

*Wild, sensual, charismatic*

**Leah 1 – eleven**

*Ugly glasses, orphan, feisty*

**Kitty 1 – eleven**

*Feral, motherless, impulsive*

All (other) characters are part of Chorus 1 or/and Chorus 2.

## Chorus 1

**Sam** – four years older than Leah – her Communist Party brother

**Rosa** – six years older than Leah – her religious sister

**Patrick** – young Irish docker

**Ged** – young Irish docker, Sam's comrade

**Eva** – Jewish garment factory worker

**Anna** – Jewish garment factory worker

**Doll** – an activist, Sam's comrade

## Worker 1/Protector 1

Jewish Man/Survivor/Milewski voice  
Tenants/Locals/Hecklers/Reds/Sweatshop Workers/Anti-fascists/Protestors

## Chorus 2

Billy – seventeen to nineteen, English  
Joyce – eighteen to twenty, Billy's sister  
Kitty's Dad – thirties, Irish heritage (also Chorus 1 in 'Blood Sisters' and 'The Battle of Cable Street')

Jack – four years old, Kitty's son. Voiced by Chorus member  
Oswald Mosley – leader of British Union of Fascists (BUF)

## Bailiff

Policeman 1

Policeman 2

Police/Fascists/Blackshirts

Note: With a smaller cast, one actor can play multiple roles across Chorus 1 and 2

E.g. – Kitty's Dad/Patrick/Oswald Mosley/Bailiff  
– Doll/Eva/Jack/Joyce

## Eviction 1

Music. Try the refrain of 'Whitechapel' (1951) for atmospheric sense of returning to this bygone era. Or 1930s East End Yiddisher jazz.

Title: Whitechapel, September 1st 1939

Outside a slum mansion block. Barricade made of shabby furniture, doors, crates, etc.

Big banners: 'Stepney Tenants' Defence League' and 'No Evictions'.

Homemade placards with slogans:

'Luxury Flats – No Extra for Rats'

'Our Mansion Block Is a Slum'

'Repairs before Rent Rises'

'Less Rent Means More Milk'

Jewish Tenants, possibly amongst the audience too, led by Doll with megaphone.

Leah 3 arrives in nurse's uniform with bag slung over shoulder. Eyes the barricade.

Leah 3 And how the bloody hell am I s'posed to get over that?

Doll It's to keep the bailiff out.

Leah 3 And what about your (reads from bit of paper) 'poor woman with three sick kids'? (Looks up.) What floor is she?

Doll Third – that window with the ripped net curtain –

Leah 3 sighs and hitches up her nurse's dress. Doll sees Bailiff and two Police arrive.

Doll (chants at Police) They shall not pass.

Tenants (chant at Police) They shall not pass. They shall not . . .

All stop to watch in awe as Leah 3 climbs drainpipe, strong and sure-footed. Rising eye-line of Tenants' impressed faces. Gasps as drainpipe comes away. Shocked, Leah 3 sees Kitty 3 at window holding out a hand. No choice but to grab it. Tenants cheer, part to reveal . . .

Inside a small, shabby rented room. Kitty's boys (aged four and two) ill in bed. Kitty's baby girl sleeps in a crate cot. Leah 3 can't take her shocked eyes from Kitty 3's long facial scar.

Leah 3 (whispers) Kitty?

Kitty 3 Look on your face when the drainpipe fell. Shinned it like a little monkey.

Leah 3 I . . .

Kitty 3 Admiring your handiwork?

# Cable Street

BY LISA GOLDMAN

*Notes on rehearsal and staging, drawn from a workshop with the writer, held at the National Theatre, October 2021*

## How the writer came to write the play

Originally it was commissioned as a short film in the context of Brexit, about female friendship with two people who had diametrically opposed opinions. But the story became much bigger, and Lisa Goldman was taken down a 1930s path after reading a book by Phil Piratin about communists defending some fascists from being evicted from their homes. Goldman became very interested in how activists would defend fascists on the basis of working-class solidarity, and how they tried to change their views.

Cable Street was a great victory of the working class over the Blackshirts and the rise of British fascism. Lisa Goldman has family history connected to the area: her grandparents were both at the Battle of Cable Street, but she realised many people did not know about this historical event. Many of the stories in the play are Goldman's family stories – mostly from the Jewish side of her family. For example, the dockers coming round and giving solidarity money to Sam is a real story and happened to Goldman's granddad after he was blacklisted for organising workers. Lisa Goldman had this intense feeling that her ancestors were at her shoulder while she wrote it.

Many people where Lisa Goldman grew up in the 1970s had fascist sympathies. Her family had a Jewish Communist Party background, and she grew up around people who would openly call themselves fascists. This period is subtextually there as well as the present day and the 1930s.

The play connects with 'cancel culture' and the divisions of Brexit. The Black Lives Matter movement, and the solidarity and divisions from Covid also resonate.

This play shares a working-class history with the next generation. It is a queer, working-class, coming-of-age love story.

The central premise of the play is: Can you be friends or lovers with someone who has completely opposing views to you?

## Approaching the play

*Cable Street* is a character-led piece. Stylistically, it moves between naturalism to 'Brechtian' elements – borrowing from 1930s traditions (including Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl's Theatre of Action and Theatre Union).

It should be emotionally authentic, and you should allow your young people to find their own way into it.

Lead director Audrey Sheffield likes to get a bird's-eye overview of a play before rehearsals, in order to see the throughline and the development of the characters. Structurally, this helps understand how a scene feeds into the whole play.

Writing a chronological timeline for the play, and also a scene breakdown, will be helpful for you in preparing – you could also add location, scene title, scene number and time in your scene breakdown.

Practically, consider how to involve members of your company who are called for rehearsals but who do not have as many lines in a scene. While you are working with one group, could you set some of the exercises (see below) as tasks for other members of the company?

The more all the Kittys and Leahs have a shared understanding of all the events of the play, the better.

## Episodes and events

Breaking down the play into sections or manageable chunks (sometimes called a 'unit' or 'beat', but here referred to as an 'episode') is helpful for managing your rehearsals, and also ensures clarity of storytelling. An 'event' occurs when something new comes in, or when most of the characters' thinking shifts – an event also signals the start of a new episode. An event intensifies a character's thinking.

You can draw a line in the script to mark the new episode.

Which character is driving the 'beat'? For Lisa Goldman, the beat shifts when the character either achieves their 'want' or isn't able to achieve it.

In the opening scene, 'The Barricade' could be the title given to the episode – but all of the characters will have their own relationships or affinities to the barricade. For Audrey, the event is when Leah recognises Kitty in the window, rather than the climbing of the drainpipe (but there is no definitive right or wrong in deciding what is and isn't an event). And so, you move to a new episode with this event.

You could label the main events of the play, or within scenes – but do not get bogged down in this.

## Structure, style and transitions

The play jumps around in time – the scope of the timespan is across several years, in a non-linear structure.

It is important to maintain the clarity of the emotional journey of the characters either through the play – they are the emotional spine of the story. Observing their throughline will help to keep the story clear. The epic feeds into the intimate and vice versa.

There are twenty scenes and four different time periods. There is, in a sense, a chronological backbone which underpins the structure, even though it is non-linear.

1931, Leah 1 and Kitty 1, three scenes, takes place within an hour

1934, Leah 2 and Kitty 2, takes place over three months – consecutive/chronological

1936, Leah 2 and Kitty 2, for three weeks – consecutive/chronological

1939, Leah 3 and Kitty 3, three scenes, takes place within half an hour/an hour

The 1939 scenes with the older Kitty and Leah function as a framing device – what follows is a memory for them, with them looking back and reassessing what's happened.



There's a musicality to the structure, in the way that the scenes feel like they come in waves. At times, one scene seems to be starting before the other has finished. If you are presenting a scene title on stage, consider what the timing of the appearance of this title should be, if one scene bleeds into another.

There is a momentum to the narrative – it is all leading to the Battle of Cable Street.

There is an ambiguity to the ending – how do you leave it for the audience? Lisa Goldman confirmed that we do need to believe in Kitty and Leah's love for each other at this moment, even if we are not sure what will happen next with their relationship.

### Characters and characterisation

Everyone is a character, i.e. the Chorus is not a lump of people – avoid choric declaiming. Each member of the Chorus is a character. Aim to be as rich and specific as you can be for each character.

All of the characters have an emotional arc, and Goldman's advice is for performers to enjoy the emotional rawness, truthfulness and smartness of the characters.

The characters, apart from Oswald Mosley, are working-class characters – the performers don't need to do cockney accents, but they should strive for working-class authenticity.

Is there a physical characterisation which unites all of the Kittys and Leahs? For the younger Kitty and Leah, the physical language of games could be worth exploring.

Consider the groupings of characters – family/friends/colleagues. Improvisations and setting exercises for performers while they are not working on a scene will help bring out the relationships of these groupings.

### Casting

Leah 2 and Kitty 2 should be your most confident performers, because those roles are very challenging. Lisa Goldman would suggest over-sixteens. It is a female-led play, and for Goldman the casting of Kittys and Leahs should ideally be female.

The play is written to be expandable/contractable with larger and small cast sizes as required.

There are some smaller roles in terms of lines and two really large roles, which might be an issue with larger companies with many confident performers. You could reassure performers as to the centrality of the chorus.

### Production, staging and design

Lisa Goldman advised directors not to skip over moments which you might find difficult to stage.

Stage directions – it doesn't need to be exactly those directions, and they are not intended as instructions. But for Goldman those emotional beats cannot be missed, otherwise you won't be following the story. The important thing is to understand what is happening at that moment, but you don't necessarily need to do it exactly that way. It is open to interpretation as to how those stage directions or that emotional beat is expressed

There are points in the play where all three Kittys and Leahs are on stage. Could they always be visible on stage throughout, or could they come and go? Is the Chorus on stage throughout, or do they come and go?

Red and black imagery is interesting to explore – in terms of costume (such as the red dress and the Blackshirts), but also certain props (such as the jam and the marbles)

Music – the play itself has a musical quality, and music could play an important role in your production.

You can choose to be contemporary or historical – or a blend of the two – for costume and music. The opportunity is there to explore.

Titles – It could be helpful for the audience for these to be presented on stage in some form.

Lisa Goldman suggested that the opening barricade could be a pre-show sequence, with the action building as the audience enters the space. All furniture and props for other scenes comes from the barricade.

How to stage the climbing-up the drainpipe moment? Lisa Goldman states that she didn't imagine a performer literally climbing a drainpipe. It could be achieved with the Chorus's eyeline rising, to give the sense of climbing, and the Chorus part to reveal the room as the new location. Alternatively, could the Chorus become the drainpipe? Could elements of scenography be used – such as rostra levels?

### Exercises for use in rehearsals

#### Exercise: Prompts for discussion – A to B

In pairs, labelled A and B, themes/topics can be used to prompt discussion. Responding to the prompt, A talks to B for two minutes and then vice versa. Whatever is said is fine, it doesn't need to be profound – it can be from personal experience, abstract or random word association. This is a great way to start a conversation if the company members are new to each other, and also to engage with the themes and ideas of the play.

With each new word-prompt, Bs move to another person, so that each time, the exercise is with a new pairing.

Example prompt words:

- betrayal
- best friends
- finding your voice
- solidarity

Consider what prompts might be most suitable for your group.

This exercise could also be used to unlock a scene you are finding challenging.

#### Exercise: Where do you stand?

This exercise can be used to introduce the themes at the start of the process, or it can be used to help unlock a scene.

Everyone begins standing in the middle of the room, and the facilitator feeds in a provocation/statement (the stronger or more controversial the better). There is an imaginary spectrum of strongly agree to strongly disagree from one side of the room to the other, and the company positions themselves along this spectrum in response to the statement.

The facilitator draws upon the person nearest to one side of the room to explain why they have taken their position.

And this helps elicit a conversation or debate between people around the topic.

People can change their initial position on the spectrum once the conversation draws itself to a close. Has anyone changed position after having heard the different views of the group?

Example provocations, drawing from the themes/story:

'You can never really be close friends with someone who has completely opposite views to you'

'It is always better just to keep your head down, even if you see something you disagree with and it's not OK'

You want to make it an honest, inclusive space, and to help young people find their voice, and engage with the ideas of the play.

You could begin with provocations which are not related to the play to introduce the exercise to the group. For example: 'Footballers deserve to be paid what they earn.'

You could use this exercise in character later on in the rehearsal process too.

### Exercise: Visualising the play (in groups of four or five)

Draw or sketch (stick figures are fine) the five most important images of the play. What are the key moments in the play? There is no right or wrong answer, but it is useful to discuss as a group.

Another approach is visualising the themes through images too.

Examples of some images selected:

- 1 Playing marbles and the blood sisters
- 2 First kiss
- 3 Ending
- 5 Billy fire-bombing the workshop
- 6 Barricade

This exercise can help open up thoughts about design. What's the minimum you need to tell the story? But the exercise can also prompt discussions about characters, themes and staging.

You can then order the five images in level of importance and/or lay out the images in the order in which they appear in the play, or in the chronological order of the story.

A further element to the exercise: you could then distil the five images to three, and then choose one, which can help you as a director find the most important aspect of the story to you.

### Exercise: Spirit of the play

Each company member finds one thing which for them encapsulates the spirit of the play:

- piece of research
- song
- image
- physical gesture
- photograph
- poem
- stream of consciousness
- painting
- music video

These can be collated and used as a resource in the rehearsal process, or even possibly used in the production. This also helps ensure all young people are engaged in the story and gives them a voice in the process.

### Exercise: Finding the facts

This could be either something you do as a director as preparation before rehearsals, or something you do with your company.

What do we mean by a fact? Identifying circumstances or happenings which have taken place in the story without any doubt, or confirmed by independent witnesses.

It helps establish a shared world for the play.

With a company, this can be done physically walking around the room with everyone contributing and sharing as facts come to mind, or seated and writing them down as you read through the script.

Examples of facts: ages, heritage of characters, where they live, where they work.

Examples of other facts from the workshop:

- Rosa doesn't like Kitty;
- Sam reads the *Daily Worker* and he has friends, Ged and Pat, who are Irish;
- Leah becomes a nurse.

The next stage is identifying and clarifying what Audrey Sheffield refers to as 'blurred facts' which are implicit assumptions, and questions, and then filling in the gaps raised by those questions.

Example of questions from the first scene: How long has Kitty been in the apartment? Who does she live with? What is her home like? Is Billy the father to all of Kitty's children?

Audrey Sheffield advised not to overcomplicate this when filling in the gaps, and to keep it clear – you should find the answer which best tells your story. Lisa Goldman also suggested that you answer these questions with the most interesting choice. These

blurred facts and questions might shift as you explore a scene, and you might start to change your mind about answers to blurred facts/questions.

Other examples of questions raised in the workshop:

Does Kitty know it was Leah who wrote 'I love you' in the sand?

Does Billy leave Kitty because of her scar? (Lisa Goldman's response: 'Yes, that's exactly what I had in my mind')

Where are the parents of Kitty and Leah? (In Goldman's imagined world of the play: the mother of Kitty is in an asylum, probably a year or two before we meet Kitty. Both of Leah's parents are dead.)

#### **Exercise: Improvising the moments just before the scene starts**

For the scenes which start midway in the action, you could ask your company to improvise what has come just before the start of the scene. This helps them find the right intensity and context for the scene.

#### **Exercise: Repetition**

The performers read the scene through once aloud.

The performers reread the scene, but this time repeat the last two words of the previous line before saying their line.

Read the scene again after the repetition exercise. What has changed? Has it helped you understand the scene better?

This exercise encourages 'active listening' and 'reaction' in performance, and helps understand the characters' thought-processes, and clarity of storytelling.

#### **Exercise: Thinking aloud**

As an exercise, when rehearsing a scene, encourage your company to speak their characters' thoughts aloud – their characters' inner-monologue.

Read the scene once.

Then re-read the scene again, encouraging anyone to voice out loud their characters' inner thoughts (but not too loud, so that it's not too distracting for the other performers' spoken lines).

Return to the scene as written, using what has been learnt from the exercise about the subtext, attitudes and thoughts of the characters.

This could be particularly useful when exploring the Chorus scenes – how they are coming and going, moving in and out of focus. Establishing the relationships amongst the Chorus and their relationship to the other characters.

#### **Exercise: Questions**

You could use questions, such as the examples below, to help develop characters. They could be used during hot-seating exercises, as homework, or you could use particular questions to help tackle a particular scene.

How old are you?

What is your full name?

What are you good at?

What do you like to do?

How do you feel about money?

Where do you live?

Who do you live with?

What's your favourite food?

Is there someone you miss?

What have you got in your pockets?

Who's your best friend?

Is there a time you wish you had stood up for someone?

Do you have a secret?

What's your most treasured item and why?

Who did you last speak to? And what did you talk about?

What are you most frightened about?

What makes you happy?

Do you have a hero or a role model?

What's the angriest you've ever been?

Is there something you believe in?

Do you have parents?

Where was the time you laughed the most and who you were with?

If you could change one thing about yourself or the world, what would it be?

Lisa Goldman added that in Mike Leigh's process, the character has to be doing a physical action while answering questions such as these, so that they are in-the-flow and don't get too heady. Having a physical action allows them to respond in an embodied way as they answer the questions silently. Words can be used as emotional prompts instead of questions; e.g. fascism; jam; school.

The response to these questions could also be as a diary entry or a blog.

#### **Challenges**

These are some of the challenges which directors commented they expected to encounter when rehearsing the play:

- the intimate moments and making performers feel comfortable; also factoring in the context of other students watching/observing during rehearsals, if all of the company needs to be present for each rehearsal (such as rehearsing during curriculum time);

- working with a small cast – reassigning lines and gender of characters. Could Leah 1 and 3/Kitty 1 and 3 be doubled with other characters to have a cast size under twelve?
- how to build a chorus without taking attention away from the main characters and those smaller intimate moments;
- maintaining the fluidity of scene transitions;
- some students' unfamiliarity with Brechtian style;
- filmic aspect of the script and the transitions.

## Intimacy

Yarit Dor, an intimacy director, movement director and fight director offered some guidance on how to approach some of the more intimate moments of the play.

Identify which moments have intimacy: the kissing scene, under-the-covers tickling, playing with the hair, touching the scar, etc.

Moments of intimacy can be split into: contact-based intimacy and non-contact-based intimacy. These moments can also be contextualised as familial intimacy, intimacy between lovers, or their employment (for example, Leah 3 as a nurse).

Examples of non-contact-based intimacy: eye-contact, 'breathing each other in', verbal intimacy, ways of looking at each other, moments of attraction, tension building towards intimacy or violence.

Sometimes using the word 'intimacy' freaks people out or could even be triggering. Focus on what the characters do in terms of intimacy, and encourage the company to talk about the play and the characters, rather than what the 'performers' are doing.

If you have company members who do not consent to contact-based intimacy, what are the other avenues for the intimate moments, which would not involve lip-to-lip contact? Could you take a more stylised/more abstract approach, instead of naturalism?

Approach intimate moments using Intimacy Directors International's 'Pillars of Intimacy': **CONTEXT** **CONSENT** **COMMUNICATION** **CHOREOGRAPHY** **CLOSURE**

**CONTEXT:** What is happening in the scene? What are the given circumstances, who is there?

Stage directions give you the context of intimate actions, but performers might also devise actions inspired by the context.

What are the stage directions giving you and why should you follow them?

What is your impression/the energy of the stage directions? What is the power dynamic? Is it consensual?

What is the story you want to tell? What energy do you want to focus on? What is the timing/tempo of this intimacy? Where would the pauses be? In the pause, the action can tell you whether the character consents.

So, if an actor feels uncomfortable with a kiss, for example, what other action would tell the same story? You can build other offers when you understand the story.

**CONSENT:** Discuss with the company the consent of the character, as well as their own consent as performers. Even if a performer is aware intimacy is required for a role when they are auditioning, consent is required for specific staging choices of intimate moments. See below for 'boundary check'.

**COMMUNICATION:** Setting up the working language by avoiding derogatory or slang language. Decide with your group what you want to call particular parts of the body – for instance, collar bone, rather than being too vague, such as torso. 'Mouth' might be preferred to 'lip', and 'chest' might be preferred to 'breast'. For instance, for the moment with the lifting of the skirt, being clear which part of the thigh (if any) is being touched would be important – inner, outer, back of thighs?

This language is also then a working tool for choreography.

Communicate how you are going to rehearse the intimate moments, so the performers understand how it will be treated – e.g. 'next week we are rehearsing this scene including the moment when the characters kiss'.

**CHOREOGRAPHY:** How does a body part come into contact with another body? What is the duration? And the speed? What's the quality of the movement? (i.e. is it a light hand touch as opposed to gripping?)

**CLOSURE:** Check-in/debrief after an intimate moment – how did that feel?

After this intimate contact, lead another physical action with performers, such as pendulum coordination swings or a ball game as part of their closure.

## Choreography exercise for directors

Devise possible variations of staging an intimate moment: one side of the spectrum, super-naturalism, and at the other end, overly stylised (physical theatre/dance).

What is your plan B/counter-offer if contact is not possible between performers at both ends of the spectrum?

Examples from the workshop for the kisses between Kitty and Leah (p.21):

Stylised version with no contact: Passion and reactions displayed out to the audience? The stage directions spoken? Freeze frames using the Brechtian style of getting closer?

Stylised version with contact: Choreography of hands touching instead of lips? Tango or mating dance? Transposing the anatomical action of kissing to a stylised movement?

Naturalistic without mouth contact: Physical proximity, hands in hair and closeness of face?

Naturalistic with mouth contact: Considering the force of the movement, how the control shifts and the pacing of it.

In response to this exercise, Lisa Goldman reiterated that it is important for her that the first kiss between Kitty and Leah is a sexually charged moment, and that it is shocking for Leah. Goldman expressed doubt as to whether this can be achieved in a stylised way, as it is realism and there is already stylisation with Billy. But that doesn't necessarily mean actual lip contact – just staging in a clever way to be true to the play.

She hoped that advice on this safe staging could be offered rather than just exploring ways to avoid a key moment in the play.

### Other practical considerations

Ideally intimate moments should be initially rehearsed only with the people who need to be there for that rehearsal. However, having a third person in the room (rather than solely director and performers), such as an assistant director or a stage manager, is advisable. The last thing to be rehearsed is the lip-to-lip touch; instead start with the peripheries of the body.

### Boundary check

As part of the process of consent, you set up a boundary check – where a performer is comfortable to be touched by another performer. It is best for a performer to speak and demonstrate this boundary check at the same time, and for the listener (the other performer) to mimic this with their own body (some people learn aurally, visually or kinaesthetically); i.e. ‘not below my lower back’ is spoken while the performer physically demonstrates the limit of where they consider the boundary line of their lower back to be.

To avoid unnecessary and repeated physical contact, a ‘placeholder’ can be substituted in rehearsals, such as a palm-to-palm touch, instead of lip-to-lip contact, after having walked through the scene.

Giving performers a roadmap, by creating a choreographed structure, is helpful – for instance, which way does the head go and return to for a kiss?

Tongue kissing is not required for stage kissing, as it would not be visible to an audience, so this can be noted to performers.

### Simulation of naturalistic intimacy

If you would prefer to stage a naturalistic kiss between the characters, but the performer do not wish to make lip-to-lip contact, it is possible to simulate a kiss. However, Yari Dor advises that this requires a lot of rehearsal to make look realistic and to avoid accidental lip contact.

Yari Dor demonstrated the simulation of a kiss: temple to temple, noses slightly towards each other. If a character is wearing a hat this can be helpful for obscuring Hands onto the cheek of the other person can help mask the gap. And then readjusting the positions of the hands after this moment.

For simulating a quick kiss, the performer anchors their hands to their own jawline, moving in quickly (the hands obscure) and leaving a gap between the mouth of the two performers.

Lisa Goldman suggests an exercise used by Mike Leigh, where performers act out what their bodies are doing initially with their hands only, and then with each other's hands. This creates trust and emotional connection, and a shared and secret understanding of what is happening between the two characters alone.

### Suggested references

The Cable Street website is a great resource with a large number of interviews and photographs: [www.cablestreet.uk](http://www.cablestreet.uk)

The following books were part of Lisa Goldman's historical research:

*Battle for the East End* – David Rosenberg

*East End My Cradle* – Willy Goldman

*Everything Happens in Cable Street* – Roger Mills

*Jew Boy* – Simon Blumenfeld

*Our Flag Stays Red* – Phil Piratin

*Remembering Cable Street: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Society* – Tony Kushner/Nadia Valman

*From a workshop led by Audrey Sheffield, with intimacy session led by Yari Dor*  
*With notes by Oliver O'Shea*