National Theatre

Noughts and Crosses: Teachers' Educational Resource Pack

Archive Resource Pack

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This resource pack contain themes and details that might be challenging, emotionally activating or triggering. It is not our intention to cause distress or harm but to support your understanding of the play and its creative and historical contexts.

Please contact the National Theatre Archive (archive@nationaltheatre.org.uk) for any questions, enquiries, or feedback about the material within this resource.

Introduction

As an adult reading *Noughts and Crosses* a few years after it was published, I knew that this was a story that I had needed as a teenager. In a rural English county, I was both invisible and hyper-visible; aware that every situation was different for me, from my white friends, without the language to exactly describe what power dynamics were at play. Histories that were directly and indirectly mine still influenced how I was perceived and how I was expected to behave – that even in the 1990s I should 'know my place'. Without authorised segregation, racially motivated exclusion, violence and attacks across the country, at the time, are evidence of the implicit ideology of superiority that continued to allow white people to uphold systems of oppression and inequality, and enact discriminatory behaviour. Yet, according to many British people, racism no longer existed and everyone was equal.

Malorie Blackman found an effective way to revive what has always been and will continue to be a very difficult conversation: how to help people understand that racism is more or less a permanent element of our society, that people need to know all the stories that make up our history to understand how they are complicit with the current structures and practices of racial discrimination, and how to unlearn the harmful beliefs and stereotypes that they do not choose but are given to believe are true as they grow up. Through *Noughts and Crosses* Malorie Blackman explores two questions: what if the power attained through enslavement, subjugation and lies was created and controlled by Black people? What if white people had been classed as the lowest human: unintelligent, dangerous and abhorrent?

These heavy questions form the world in which Callum and Sephy exist. A world that holds a beautiful and liberating story of love. A world which contains all of the complexities, fears and joys of our own. Sephy and Callum's friendship and love is affirming for many young people: the confusion of new feelings, navigating social rules that don't make sense and the paradox of knowing freedom whilst always being constrained. A familiarity that validates their own experiences or a reassurance that they can move beyond the bounds of their current circumstances. Whilst these protagonists experience extraordinary situations (all real and possible events) they are not required to be superhuman. They are ordinary young people asking themselves and each

other to be courageous and endure what seems unbearable; to accept their own and each other's mistakes and to have faith in one another.

Noughts and Crosses has been skilfully brought to life in different stage adaptations of the book. This resource pack references the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre production of Dominic Cooke's adaptation, directed by Tinuke Craig in 2025. It was amazing to witness audiences made up of families (children, parents and grandparents) who wanted to experience the story together and to watch young people's honest and visceral responses (laughter, shock and tears) to each moment. Their reactions made it clear that Sephy and Callum's situation is relatable and that the story of *Noughts and Crosses* remains crucial.

The book and the plays are forms of resistance. *Noughts and Crosses* is more than a thought experiment, it is a recognition of the arbitrary and cruel realities of our society and a call for individual and collective action to end discrimination and create a kinder and more equitable society.

- mezze eade, 2026

About the novel

Noughts and Crosses is a novel by Malorie Blackman. Published in 2001, the novel follows Callum (a Nought) and Sephy (a Cross), two young people who become friends and later fall in love in a deeply segregated world. The novel was Blackman's 50th book and it has since become a classic among literature for young people, resulting in numerous sequels and novellas in the series.

The story is set in the fictional world of Albion, where Crosses colonised and enslaved the Noughts. Now free, the Noughts are segregated from the Crosses, with restricted access to education, well-paid jobs and adequate standards of living. Albion belongs to a global coalition called the 'Pangean Economic Community'. In the story, it is not clear when the Crosses colonised Albion and enslaved the Noughts, though slavery ended over 500 years before Callum and Sephy's time (this would be by the 1500s using the date the novel was published). The Crosses have a monotheistic religion with a God and a 'song of God'. The teachings of this God are written in the 'Good Book'. The McGregors (Callum's family) don't believe in this God because the 'Good Book' was written and translated by Crosses. In the play, the Noughts are played by white actors while the Crosses are played by Black actors.

The novel was first adapted for the stage by Dominic Cooke in 2007 for the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) before a second adaptation was written by playwright Sabrina Mahfouz in 2019 for Pilot Theatre. In 2025, an updated version of Cooke's adaptation was staged at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre. This resource focuses on the adaptation by Dominic Cooke and the staging at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre.

Production timeline

2001	*Noughts and Crosses* is published, it is Malorie Blackman's 50th book.
2007	The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) stages an adaptation written and directed by Dominic Cooke.
2008	The RSC's production tours the UK.

2019	Pilot Theatre stages another adaptation of the book by playwright Sabrina Mahfouz.
2020	The BBC produces a TV adaptation of *Noughts and Crosses*.
2022/2023	The Pilot Theatre production tours the UK.
2025	Regent's Park Open Air Theatre stages an updated version of Dominic Cooke's adaptation.
2026	The Pilot Theatre production tours the UK.



The cast of Noughts and Crosses *at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre in 2025. Photo by Manuel Harlan.*

Significant words

In the novel, Malorie Blackman uses a variety of words and names that are also used in Dominic Cooke's adaptation for the stage. Here they are below:

Word	Meaning
Albion	An early name for Britain. It is usually translated as 'white land', referring to the white chalk cliffs at Dover (Celtic – *Albio*, Gaelic – *Alba*).
Blanker	A racial slur for noughts. *Blankes* is the Afrikaner word for whites.
Callum	Means dove.
Callie	Represents the Greek word 'Kali', which means good or beautiful.
Dagger	A pejorative term for Crosses.
Liberation Militia	Are a group fighting for the rights of Noughts and for an equitable society.
Minerva	The Roman name for the Greek god Athene, meaning intelligence and wisdom.
Pangaea	Refers to when the continents of Africa, Europe, South America and North America were one large landmass. Pangaea comes from the Ancient Greek word *pan*, meaning 'all' and *gaea* meaning 'earth'.
Persephone	The daughter of Zeus and Demeter in Greek mythology. Her name means 'bringer of death' but she is also a symbol of spring and new life. In the novel Sephy says her names means 'serene night'.
Shaka	A Zulu warrior king in the 1800s. The angel Shaka may be the equivalent of the archangel Gabriel: God's power. Gabriel is both a messenger and a warrior.

Historical context

Real world history

The world of *Noughts and Crosses* draws upon current and historical racist socio-political systems and places which enable financial and political power to be held and controlled by a particular group of people. This power was built on a false ideology which claims that white people were intrinsically the most ideal humans and that Africans, Black people, were inferior. This ideology began to be formally constructed and disseminated from the 1500s. Over the centuries many white Europeans contributed to the pseudoscientific idea of a human 'race ladder', placing whiteness at the top, with global majority people below, and Africans at the bottom. Physical differences such as skin tone, hair texture and skull size were used to categorise and ascribe intellectual capacity and value to different humans.

As white Europeans began travelling around the world and encountering (not discovering) locations that were new to them, rather than understanding difference and diversity as an essential part of all things that exist on the Earth, their response was shaped by a fear driven impulse to protect and affirm their own sense of identity. Moreover, fuelled by existing power disputes between European countries, religions and families, they were motivated by the desire to acquire and own land, plants, metals, rocks and minerals. This process of taking from, occupying and colonising the land of different indigenous peoples was justified by the false belief that white Europeans were better, that they were enlightened and civilised; that indigenous peoples could be treated as subhuman and that some would benefit from the cruel treatment they were forced to endure.

'It (Britain) and other European powers were the last colonisers, the most recent winners. So they gave themselves the right to take things. They gave themselves the right to document history their way, to define the scientific facts about humankind. European thinkers told us that their cultures were better, that they were the proprietors of thought and reason, and they married this with the notion that they belonged to a superior race. These became our realities. The truth is something else.'

Superior: The Return of Race Science by Angela Saini (2019)

South Africa

In 1652 Dutch farmers, Boers, settled in the Cape of Good Hope, after the Dutch East India Company had established an outpost in South Africa to provide supplies of food and fresh water to ships travelling between Europe and South Asia as well as East and Southeast Asia. As the Dutch colonies grew, the Boers forced indigenous Africans off the land on which they had lived for many millennia, and into low paid farm labour. The Boers also used enslaved people from Madagascar, Indonesia and Sri Lanka to work on their farms. In 1795 British troops took control of Cape Town and began the process of displacing the Boer settlers and occupying more indigenous African land. When diamonds were discovered in 1868 and gold in 1886, the British monopolised control of the mines and mining. More British and many Germans moved to South Africa to make money from the mines. Indigenous Africans were forced to live on infertile land, known as 'native reserves', and were unable to grow crops to eat or sell. The men were forced to work in the mines, doing the most dangerous work for very little pay.

The Boers believed they had a greater right to the land and created a distinct identity, Afrikaner, from the British and other white Europeans. Although opposed on many issues the British, Afrikaners and other white people worked together to deny indigenous Africans access to education, well paid jobs and reasonable living conditions. From 1910, the Union of South Africa became independent from the British Empire and was governed by different whites-only political parties. Indigenous African people were denied the right to vote and in 1913 were prevented from owning or renting land outside of the reserves. Then in 1923 the introduction of an internal passport system further restricted the movement of Black South Africans. South and Southeast Asian people, who were classified as Indian, also suffered severe restrictions. Led by the Afrikaner National Party, governing whites manipulated the poor white people into supporting a racial hierarchy which culminated in the introduction of a system of 'separateness' – Apartheid.

- Research Apartheid South Africa (use the links at the end of the pack if you are unsure of where to start). How is Albion similar and different to Apartheid South Africa?

America

Spain and Portugal were the first white Europeans to lay claim on land in (what we now call) Canada, the Caribbean and North and South America. They were swiftly followed, in the 16th and 17th centuries, by France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark (which at the time included Norway) and England. The Indigenous people were disregarded of having any rights over the land and were either driven off or forced to work on the land taken by the white Europeans. Many thousands of Indigenous people died through genocide and from diseases and infections, sometimes deliberately, transmitted by the white Europeans. From the 17th century, white European settlers included (but were not limited to) people from Ireland, Germany, Italy, Finland and Russia.

In 1607, England established its first permanent settlement called Jamestown, in what is now the state of Virginia in the United States of America. Settlements along the east coast continued until England had 13 permanent colonies from Georgia in the south to Maine in the North. The earliest colonies, Virginia, Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, were founded by joint-stock companies working under the Royal Charter. Later colonies were established by individual owners who were governed by the king of England. These merchants and landowners set up farms and tobacco plantations, initially using indentured servants – poor white Europeans who worked the cost of their boat passage to America. However, English-owned plantations became profitable through the practice of enslaving African people. From the 1790s, cotton plantations, and therefore the enslavement of African people, increased exponentially into the 1800s.

For nearly 300 years, the majority of white people in the Caribbean and South and North America taught their children that Black people were less than human. Some plantation owners did grant freedom to the Black people they had enslaved and some allowed the enslaved Black people to do paid work in order to buy their freedom. Enslaved people who had run away lived in fear of being recaptured. Enslaved people were required to have a pass to leave a plantation and free slaves needed written proof of their status. In America, slavery became illegal in 1863 but did not end until after the Civil War in 1865 (slavery became illegal in 1833 in Britian and its colonies). However, white people sought new ways to maintain their power and restrict Black people. All Black people were subject to 'black codes' which included prohibition from carrying a weapon and interracial marriage. These codes became the basis for

Jim Crow Laws in the United States, which continued the segregation and discrimination of Black people. This in turn became the foundation of the Prison Industrial Complex and persistent targeted oppression of Black people in the United States of America.



"Leaders at the Head of the Civil Rights March on Washington" by archivesfoundation is licensed under CC

Leaders at the Head of the Civil Rights March on Washington (1963), including Martin Luther King Jr.

I wanted to write a story about the legacy of slavery. About how attitudes way back when, still influence all our lives and the way we think and live today. I really believe the subject of slavery is terribly important – especially in this day and age. I think it gives a context to modern day Western World thinking and attitudes regarding other races and cultures.

Malorie Blackman on *Noughts and Crosses* (2016).

Characters

CALLUM McGREGOR

A 15-year-old Nought (white) boy. Callum has worked hard to gain a scholarship to attend a Cross school. Callum is acutely aware of the inequality and inequity of Noughts' lives and the difficulty of maintaining any kind of relationship with Sephy. He has taken the risk to keep secretly meeting Sephy after his mother was sacked by Jasmine Hadley.

SEPHY HADLEY

A 14-year-old Cross (Black) girl, known as Sephy (her full name is Persephone). Her mother, Jasmine, is from a rich Cross family and her father, Kamal, is Deputy Prime Minister. Despite and because of her friendship with Callum, Sephy is naïve about the racial dynamics; she does not understand the privilege of being a Cross or realise the extent of oppression experienced by noughts.

MEGGIE McGREGOR

A Nought (white) woman. Callum, Jude and Lynette's mother, she is married to Ryan. Meggie worked as a nanny for the Hadley family for over 14 years before she was sacked by Jasmine. Meggie is strong willed and works hard to keep her family together. She wants the best for everyone but is realistic about how oppression impacts and restricts Noughts' lives.

JASMINE (ADEYEBE) HADLEY

A Cross (Black) woman, and Sephy and Minerva's mother. Jasmine is married to Kamal and does not work. Jasmine's wealth means that she is not dependant on her husband, and that she has been useful to Kamal's career progression. Jasmine's social life is about networking and keeping up appearances. She is lonely and has an alcohol addiction.

RYAN McGREGOR

A Nought (white) man. He is father to Lynette, Jude and Callum and is married to Meggie. Ryan is generally a quiet person and works hard to take care of his family. However, after Lynette's death he joins the Liberation Militia.

KAMAL HADLEY

A Cross (Black) man. He is father to Sephy and Minerva, and married to Jasmine. Kamal is Deputy Prime Minister (this is different to the book, where Kamal is Home Office Minister). He is separated from Jasmine and does not live with the family. He visits when he needs to present a stable 'family man' image to the country. He is in a relationship with a person called Grace.

JUDE McGREGOR

A 17-year-old Nought (white) boy and Callum's older brother. Jude is frustrated with the discrimination he, his family and all Noughts experience. He was deeply hurt that he could not continue going to school after Meggie was sacked. Jude wants better education, jobs and lives for all Noughts. He joins the Liberation militia with Ryan.

LYNETTE McGREGOR

A 20-year-old Nought, (white) woman and Callum's older sister, known as Lynny. Lynette experiences poor mental health after being violently beaten by a group of Noughts for being in a relationship with a Cross. The trauma of the attack causes Lynny to believe that she is a Cross and that she is still 17 (her age when she was attacked).

SARAH PIKE

A Nought (white) woman who works as Jasmine's personal secretary. Sarah is careful about remaining professional in front of the Hadleys. However, she acts in solidarity with Meggie and Callum and supports Callum and Sephy's relationship.

NOUGHTS

Shania and **Colin** are two of the other Nought children offered scholarships to attend Heathcroft School.

Adam Stanhope is a Nought solicitor. He works with Kelani Adams to defend Ryan McGregor.

Leila, **Morgan** and **Pete** are members of the Liberation Militia, who are part of Callum's Cell.

Addition characters include **guests at Lynette's wake** and **execution witnesses**.

CROSSES

Mr Corsa is Headmaster of Heathcroft school.
Joanne, **Dionne** and **Lola** are Cross students at Heathcroft School. They are older and in the year above Sephy.
Reporter is integrated into the scenes to provide additional social and political information about the events that happen in the play.
Kelani Adams QC is the barrister that Jasmine Hadley pays to defend Ryan McGregor.
Juno Ayelette is Kamal Hadley's personal secretary.
Mr Pingule is the prosecuting solicitor in Ryan McGregor's court hearing.
Mr Giustini is the governor of Hewmett Prison.
Jack is a prison guard at Hewmett Prison.
Additional characters include **protestors**, **students**, **shoppers**, **police** and **clerk and execution witnesses**.

Scenes

Act one, scene one

Callum and Sephy meet on Sephy's parents' private beach, next to their country house. Sephy has been helping Callum to study to gain a scholarship to attend her school, Heathcroft. Callum asks Sephy if he can kiss her. She agrees, the kiss confirms that they have stronger feelings for each other, than just being friends. Callum is anxious about attending Heathcroft. Sephy doesn't understand why he would feel this way and why it might be better if no one at school knows that they are friends.



Callum (Richard Madden), Meggie (Michelle Butterly), Jude (Freddy White), Lynette (Louise Callaghan) and Ryan (Phil McKee) in Noughts and Crosses. *Photo by Keith Pattison © RSC.*

Act one, scene two

After meeting Sephy, Callum returns to his home in a deprived area of the town. His older brother Jude knows that Callum has continued his friendship with Sephy, even after their mother was fired by Sephy's mother. Lynette's belief that she is a Cross creates further tension between the brothers: Callum is sympathetic but Jude is angry about their sister's behaviour. Their dad, Ryan, is proud of Callum and believes that going to Heathcroft School will change his son's life for the better. Their mother, Meggie, is worried as she is

anticipating the discrimination that Callum will face from the Cross teachers and students.

Act one, scene three

On Callum, Shania and Colin's first day at Heathcroft, Cross students and their parents protest outside the school. They do not want their children mixing with Noughts and they believe that Noughts do not have the right to the same level of education. Shania is injured as she tries to enter the school. Sephy is upset by the protest, and when she tries to admonish the protestors she calls them 'blankers' the slur for Noughts. Callum is harmed by the slur, particularly as it was said by his best friend.

Act one, scene four

Despite the impact of the discrimination that Callum has experienced, he still meets Sephy at the beach after school. Sephy knows that she has hurt Callum but does not understand the impact of the slur or what Callum experiences on a regular basis, and that during the rest of that day the Nought students were subject to psychological and physical discrimination.

Act one, scene five

When Callum returns home, he learns that his father tried to check on him at school but was turned away by the police. To protect his father, Callum lies and says that everything was alright for the rest of the day. The family watch the news. In an interview Kamal tries to present Albion as an inclusive society and the Liberation Militia as unreasonable terrorists.

Act one, scene six

At school Sephy sits with Callum, Shania and Colin during lunch. Callum tries to warn her that this is a bad idea. Unaware of the repercussions and how she is able to use her power, Sephy introduces herself to Shania. Mr Corsa sees this and initially discreetly tries to make Sephy leave the table. When she refuses, he physically removes her from the dinner hall. Later when Callum and Sephy meet at the beach Sephy still doesn't understand the consequences of her actions and the racial power dynamics at work in their relationship.

Act one, scene seven

Back at school Sephy faces the consequences of her actions by becoming the subject of gossip by Cross students. She avoids them and Callum but is cornered by a group of older Cross students, Lola, Joanne and Dionne. When Sephy tries to defend Callum and Noughts in general they beat her up.

Act one, scene eight

Callum rushes to Sephy's house when he learns what has happened. Sarah tries unsuccessfully to hide who is at the door from Jasmine. Jasmine communicates to Callum that she thinks it is his fault that Sephy has been beaten up.

Act one, scene nine

Sephy watches the news in her bedroom. Sephy reflects upon how the media highlights crimes carried out by Noughts, reinforcing negative stereotypes. She thinks that Callum doesn't care about what has happened to her and is unaware of how her thinking is influenced by the media. *(Note: this scene was cut from the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre production.)*

Act one, scene ten

Jude's frustration with his personal and social situation increases. He argues with Lynette, brutally trying to force her out of her delusion. Ryan intervenes but Jude, used to his father trying to appease everyone, disregards and disrespects him. Surprising everyone, Ryan slaps Jude. Ryan explains that Lynette and her Cross boyfriend were beaten up by a group of Noughts and that Lynette was in intensive care. The combination of this and Jude's comments shocks Lynette into reality – to accept that she is a Nought and that Noughts attacked her.

Act one, scene 11

Sephy is now well and back at school. Callum manages to catch her in their history class and explains that he tried to visit her every day when she was recovering. He asks Sephy to meet him at the beach after dinner.



Jude (Alec Boaden) and Lynette (Chanel Waddock) in Noughts and Crosses *at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre in 2025. Photo by Manuel Harlan.*

Act one, scene 12

At home Lynette speaks to Callum about school and the future. For Callum it feels like the conversations they had before Lynette was beaten up. Lynette indicates that she is finding it difficult to work out who she is meant to be and believe that life will improve for Noughts. Lynette warns Callum about his idealism.

Act one, scene 13

Sephy meets Callum on the beach and they reconcile. Sephy reassures Callum of her commitment to their friendship.

Act one, scene 14

When Callum returns home, Lynette is missing and Ryan has told Meggie about the fight between Jude and Lynette. Meggie does not hide how she feels about Ryan (that he is weak) and Jude (that he is lazy) which causes Jude to reveal that he wants to go to school. Jude having to leave school and Callum having a scholarship to attend a Cross school has deeply affected Jude and his feelings have been ignored. The argument is interrupted by the Cross police, who inform the family of Lynette's death. (*Note: The following action was added*

into the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre production:) Callum finds the letter Lynette left in his bedroom. She explains that she will make her death by suicide look like an accident. She only wants Callum to know the truth. Lynette hopes that his relationship with Sephy will work out and wishes Callum to be strong and to not give up. The letter makes Callum angry, because Lynette gave up on life and he swears that he never will.

Act one, scene 15

Sephy decides to go to Lynette's wake to pay her respects to the family and support Callum. She does not understand that it is an intrusion, that she represents the oppressor and is part of the reason Lynette is dead. Ryan and Jude make it clear that she is not welcome. Sephy, powerless and scared, runs out of the house. (*Note: a song was added to the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre production)*

Act one, scene 16

Later, on the beach, Sephy tells Callum that she realises that she made the wrong decision, again. However, Sephy still doesn't fully understand the stakes and what Callum has to endure. Callum once again comforts Sephy, who remains oblivious to his needs.

Act one, scene 17

Three months after Lynette's death Ryan and Jude have joined the Liberation Militia. Meggie does not agree and refuses to speak to them. After she leaves, Callum tries to persuade Ryan and Jude to take him to the Liberation Militia meeting they are attending. They refuse, Ryan insists that Callum must stay in school and eventually go to university.

Act one, scene 18

Sephy observes and reflects upon how Noughts and Crosses behave in relation to and separately from one another. (*Note: this scene was cut from the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre production.*)

Act one, scene 19

Five months after Lynette's death Callum, now 16, is at home on a Saturday. He answers a telephone call from Sephy. Sephy cannot meet him that

afternoon because she has to go shopping with her mother. Callum wants to see Sephy and, trying to act cool, he invents an excuse to meet Sephy at the shopping centre. After lunch, when Callum tells his family that he is going to the shopping centre, Jude and Ryan try to stop him. Callum realises that Sephy is in danger runs out of the house. Jude follows him.

Act one, scene 20

Sephy sits in a café as she waits for her mother to return from putting some shopping in the car. Callum, after much searching, finds her and begins to drag her out. They are stopped by a 'concerned' Cross and Sephy explains that Callum is her friend. Callum urges Sephy to run as alarms are set off in the shopping centre. Outside the shopping centre Callum tries to make Sephy keep running but she stops and a huge explosion causes Callum and Sephy to fall to the ground. After a moment Sephy remembers her mother and runs off.

Act one, scene 21

After saving Sephy from the explosion, Callum returns home. Meggie does not know what has happened until they turn on the news. Ryan and Jude arrive home pretending that they don't know what has happened. When Meggie tells them that seven people died, Jude reveals that they had something to do with the bomb, believing the Liberation Militia would give a warning and enough time for the shopping centre to be evacuated. Meggie and Ryan argue about the Liberation Militia and whether their violent action is justified. When Ryan and Jude refuse to leave the Liberation Militia, Meggie insists that they leave the house. When their parents leave, Callum lets Jude know that he knows that Jude planted the bomb and their father had nothing to do with it.

Act two, scene one

Sephy is at home, upset about her mother Jasmine's alcohol addiction and that her father Kamal will divorce Jasmine after the next election. He has a new partner. Watching the news with her mother and sister, they learn that Ryan has been arrested and charged with political terrorism. He has confessed to the charges and will be tried in court. Minerva tries to get Sephy to understand the impact that any association of the Hadley's with the McGregor family will cause problems for their father's career. Jasmine leaves the room seemingly annoyed by the sisters' bickering but is really very shaken by what is happening to the McGregor family. Sephy appeals to her sister and they share

a moment of concern about their mother.

Act two, scene two

Since Ryan's arrest, Meggie and Callum have been harassed in their home and have moved to live with Meggie's sister. They meet Mr Stanhope, a successful Nought solicitor who, with the support of an anonymous funder, has persuaded Kelani Adams to defend Ryan in court. Stanhope is not allowed to reveal who has given the money. Callum believes that it is from Sephy.

Act two, scene three

Sephy returns home from school to find that Kamal will live with them for the duration of the trial. Sephy refuses to play happy family when asked to join in a photo for publicity. Before Jasmine goes outside she hands Sephy her glass of wine. Impulsively Sephy swigs the drink until the glass is empty.

Act two, scene four

At school Mr Corsa informs Callum that he is suspended from attending the school until the outcome of his father's trial. Callum knows that he will not be allowed to return, as Shania has already been unfairly expelled and Colin, unable to endure the bullying and discrimination, has left. Having nothing to lose, in this situation, Callum storms out of Mr Corsa's office and the school.

Act two, scene five

Sephy has begun drinking alcohol regularly. (*Note: This scene was amended in the following way in the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre production:*) Jasmine notices that a bottle of wine is missing from the fridge but does not suspect Sephy. Minerva helps her mother with the ice machine so that she can have a cold glass of white wine.

Act two, scene six

Callum gives testimony in court. The prosecuting solicitor, Mr Pingule, tries to prove that Callum supports the Liberation Militia and knew about the bomb, using a video recording of Callum dragging Sephy out of the café in the shopping centre as evidence. Callum is unable to say why he wanted Sephy to leave, until Kelani Adams provides Jasmine's dislike of Callum as the reason why he was in a hurry. After the jury deliberate for one hour Ryan is found guilty of political terrorism and first degree murder.

Act two, scene seven

Two weeks after the trial Kamal's official government car collects him, Jasmine, Minerva and Sephy. Sephy does not know where they are going until they arrive at Hewmett Prison.

Act two, scene eight

Sephy is angry, shocked and upset. When she tries to leave Jasmine forces her to sit down. Sephy desperately wants Callum to know that she did not know and does not want to be there, that she doesn't support what is happening. Before Ryan can be hanged, the governor of the prison announces that Ryan's sentence has been changed to life imprisonment.

Act two, scene nine

When they return home Sephy argues with Jasmine and is cruel about her mother's drinking and disregard for the McGregor family. Jasmine reveals that she is paying Ryan's legal fees. Sephy continues to be unkind to Jasmine. After her mother leaves, Sephy drinks from a bottle wine.

Act two, scene ten

Callum and Meggie visit Ryan in prison. Ryan is unhappy about the change to his sentence, a life in prison feels unbearable. Kelani Adams arrives and is happy, she wants to begin an appeal. Ryan does not want this. Callum lies to his father, telling him that he is still at Heathcroft. Meggie notices that Ryan doesn't say goodbye when he leaves.

Act two, scene 11

Kamal has moved out and is visiting for dinner. He tells Sephy that they are sending her to Chivers Boarding School. They are worried about her association with Callum and the McGregors and how she will be treated if she returns to Heathcroft. Sephy threatens to leave and live with Callum. Kamal makes it clear that Sephy does not have a choice. When he starts to leave Jasmine tries to convince him to stay, to maintain some sort of relationship with his children. After he leaves Jasmine and Sephy argue. When Jasmine leaves Minerva confronts Sephy about her drinking, which Sephy denies.

Act two, scene 12

One night, during the beginning of the summer holiday, Callum visits Sephy. He climbs up to her balcony and into her bedroom. Sephy tells Callum that her parents are sending her to boarding school and that she wants to run away with Callum. Callum is trying to work out how he can hate and love Sephy at the same time. Sephy tells Callum that she loves him. They cuddle together on Sephy's bed and fall asleep.

Act two, scene 13

The next day Sephy and Callum are abruptly woken by Sarah banging on Sephy's bedroom door. They have slept late and Jasmine is worried about why Sephy's door is locked. Callum hides under the bed and Sephy lets her mother and Sarah into her room. Sarah realises that Callum is in the room and covers for Sephy. After Jasmine and Sarah leave, Callum kisses Sephy goodbye and gives her the address to his aunt's house. Sephy turns on her TV to discover that Ryan died by a suspected suicide, climbing the prison's electrified fence.

Act two, scene 14

At the end of the summer holiday, Sephy and Callum have not seen each other since the night he spent in her bedroom. Sephy convinces Sarah to deliver a letter to Callum at his aunt's house.

Act two, scene 15

Callum is in a café, he believes that Sephy has forgotten about him. Jude, who has not been seen since the bomb exploded at the shopping centre, appears and invites Callum to join the Liberation Militia.

Act two, scene 16

Callum returns home to pack a bag. Meggie enters and realises that Callum is leaving to join the Liberation Militia. She tries to convince him not go. After he leaves Sarah arrives with the letter from Sephy.

Act two, scene 17

Jasmine tries to hurry Sephy so they can drive to Chivers Boarding School. Sephy leaves believing that Callum isn't coming to get her. (*Note: This scene was placed before scene 16 and the additional action was added to the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre production:*) Minerva asks Sephy to stop

drinking and gives her a necklace to show that she cares for her.

Act two, scene 18

Two and a half years later Sephy returns home. She has stopped drinking, made new friends and done well at school. She still misses Callum. Sarah gives Sephy a letter from Callum, asking to meet at the beach that night. (*Note: In the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre production, Jasmine is now divorced from Kamal and is six months sober.*)



Sephy (Corinna Brown) in Noughts and Crosses *at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre in 2025. Photo by Manuel Harlan.*

Act two, scene 19

Sephy is waiting for Callum. When he arrives he kisses her and then apologises. Jude, Pete and Morgan chase her down. Sephy tries to fight them off and Jude punches her in the stomach.

Act two, scene 20

Sephy is taken to a hideout in a forest while a news reporter states that Jasmine has got into a rehabilitation facility for drugs and alcohol addiction.

Act two, scene 21

Callum forces Sephy to record a video to prove she has been kidnapped and give instructions to Kamal. He then makes her take her top off and cuts her finger, smearing the blood on her top, to use as further proof. Sephy knows that she will be killed after the Liberation Militia has received the ransom money and asks Callum to be the one that kills her. (*Note: In the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre production, Leila provokes Sephy by taking her necklace and kissing Callum*.)

Act two, scene 22

Jude's cell watch Kamal announce on TV that he is stepping back from his role and get ready to leave to collect the ransom money. They make a last-minute change to the arrangements, leaving Callum alone in the hideaway with Sephy.

Act two, scene 23

Callum tries to get Sephy to eat some food. She refuses. When Callum realises she is in pain he comforts her. Callum kisses Sephy and tells her that he loves her. They have sex for the first time. After they have made love Sephy begins to cry. Jude and Morgan return, something has gone wrong with the pick-up. Jude sees Sephy crying and assumes that Callum has raped her. Jude is furious and he and Callum fight. Sephy uses the opportunity to escape.

Act two, scene 24

In the forest Sephy is sure she will be caught. Callum finds her and sends Jude and Morgan in the wrong direction. He tells Sephy how to get out of the forest, to a road.

Act two, scene 25

Kamal makes a statement on TV that Sephy has been found and that one kidnapper has been arrested and another was killed.

Act two, scene 26

Months later Callum meets Sephy, at night, on the beach. Callum asks Sephy why she cried when they made love and she explains that she suddenly realised how futile their relationship is. That no matter how much they love one another that society will always try to force them apart. Sephy confirms that she is pregnant. They agree on names for the baby. Callum suggests that they should go away together but before they can finish their conversation the

police arrive and arrest Callum.



Callum (Richard Madden) and Sephy (Ony Uhiara) in Noughts and Crosses. *Photo by Keith Pattison © RSC.*

Act two, scene 27

Callum is playing cards in a prison cell with Jack. Callum asks if Jack thinks their society would be different if Noughts had all the power. That he wonders if life will change and get better for Noughts. Jack tells him that Sephy has tried to visit him but that Callum has not been allowed any visitors. Callum gives Jack a letter and asks him to personally deliver it to Sephy. Jack promises to do this. Kamal visits Callum to try to convince him to sign a statement saying that he raped Sephy and wants nothing to do with the baby. Kamal believes that this will cause Sephy to get rid of the child. Callum tears up the statement. The governor tells them it is time for Callum's execution.

Act two, scene 28

Callum is taken to the platform to be hanged. A guard places a hood over his head. Sephy shouts that she loves him. Callum responds that he loves Sephy. He is hanged. A reporter announces the birth of Callie Rose McGregor.

Act two, scene 29

Sephy sits on the beach, looking out at the sea, holding her and Callum's child.

Interview with Tinuke Craig

In this interview, director Tinuke Craig talks about directing *Noughts and Crosses* for the 2025 production at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre. This interview was conducted specifically for this resource by mezze eade in 2026.

Q: How did you feel when you first read the book?
Tinuke Craig (TC): When I first read it, I was 18 or 19 years old, it had been out for a little while and I was aware of the impact it had on teenagers. And I loved Malorie Blackman. I'd read lots of her books when I was younger. I remember being on the Tube and reading *Noughts and Crosses*, and having to keep looking up at everyone, imagining if the statuses were reversed – if all of the white people on the Tube had inherently less status than all the Black people on the Tube – what would that be like? And I had to keep reminding myself, reading the book and then looking up, doing that recalibration. I remember finding it really illuminating and expanding.

I talked about racism a lot. I had parents who talked about it a lot at home, so it wasn't my first place to articulate that, but I think it was the first time I'd sat with it in literature. I really enjoyed *Noughts and Crosses* even though it's really upsetting. Part of that is because you've got this flipping of Noughts and Crosses which means you can, as a Black person reading it, examine and look into your trauma and your situation without having to watch it play out on you because it's not on you. Though it is stuff that you recognise, either because it's your experience or because you've seen it around you. Maybe, if I'd read *Noughts and Crosses* with the exact same plot, but the races weren't reversed, I would have found it hard work because it would have felt like it was happening to me. But it was kind of liberating.

Q: Did you work with Malorie Blackman?
TC: Malorie was immensely supportive of everything we did, I'd say 'I'm thinking about doing this' and she'd say 'yeah, great'. We had a few interesting conversations about what it means to be dual heritage or multiethnicity or mixed race in [Albion]. Whether or not that was an identity that we felt like the play could hold versus the sort of cinematic universe of the books. In the end, we decided it couldn't. With the positioning in the book, you understand that there are people who have a Nought parent and a Cross parent, or who have ancestry that straddles the two groups. Whereas in the play it's not this. In

terms of the love story, you want to believe that this has never happened before, that Callum and Sephy are the first. This is the first time anyone has crossed this boundary.

Q: Is the story about love or race, or love and race?
TC: I think it's both. The story, the things that happen in the play and in the book are to do with these two people that fall in love, and the things that happen to them. But none of their love story happens without the background that they're in. If they were two Crosses or two Noughts and they fell in love, even if their parents were against each other, it wouldn't play out the way it plays out. There's this huge power dynamic between them. There are things that Callum knows because he's experienced and lived with them, that Sephy doesn't. There are things Sephy has access to that Callum doesn't, and that means that even in the way that they fall in love, it's really shaped by the power dynamic they have and by the fact that it's the pattern that we can place in our history. It's gone on for enough generations that it feels like the air they breathe. It's our world. When we were working on *Noughts and Crosses*, I led with the point that there isn't anything in this play that hasn't happened somewhere through history, these are experiences that people are having all the time in the real world.

When we were making the show, we talked a lot about very particular historical examples: Apartheid South Africa, America during segregation and Northern Ireland during the Troubles. These were times and places where rules were set in stone, explicit rules around race as well as all the implicit rules. Callum and Sephy's love story doesn't exist, it doesn't play out the way it does if that background isn't there. But in order to really invest in that story, for it not to feel like a history lesson, it has to be about them falling in love. They have to fall in love, they can't just be friends. It's got to be that they fall, intensely in love with each other. That overrides everything else that's going on for them.

Philippe Cato (associate director) and I spent a long time identifying moments in our three reference points: South Africa, Northern Ireland and segregated America. When the Noughts join Heathcroft School the Crosses protest outside, people throw stuff at them as they walk into the school. This happened in lots of different places, but we specifically talked about Ruby Bridges and the Little Rock Nine.

Q: Before you began rehearsals for the play, what other preparation did you do?

TC: I worked with Dominic Cooke (playwright) first. Dominic was really invested in the play because he loved the story and was really passionate about the books. He read them as an adult and wanted to adapt them because no one was really making work for teenagers. I was really passionate about making something that really worked for teenagers, so we wanted to make something that if you were 15, you were going to be the absolute target audience.

Dominic and I looked at what would stop it from feeling like now? That's not to say that there is anything particularly old-fashioned in the script, but some of the language and the slang didn't feel like they were going to land in the same way in 2025 as they did in 2007. That was to make it feel like what you're watching could be right now, to make the play reflect our world. The danger for *Noughts and Crosses* is that it feels like an exercise or thought experiment. So I was looking for ways to prevent that.

I listened to protest songs. I looked at those three periods of history, finding images that felt recognisable and even if someone didn't recognise the image, they understood its significance. We were interested in places like Belfast where you have these amazing murals about workers and people working together against common enemies.

One of the things that I was really aware of going into rehearsals was that at some point all of the white actors would be on one side and all of the Black actors on the other side. The nature of the piece is that apart from Callum and Sephy, the Noughts and Crosses don't have many scenes together. The segregation in the play was going to happen in real life. Or if we did want to do that, we were going to have to bear the consequences of that in the way that the company would connect or would not connect. I needed to find a way of making sure that they were not alienated from each other. So I spent a long time planning what that first week of rehearsals would be and how to create an environment where the whole company would work together to create the physical and theatrical language of the piece, whilst bearing in mind that some people were going to be personally impacted by the content more than others.

In the first week we mixed up the cast and, for example, we gave them words like 'predator' and 'prey', or we explored the 'have and have nots' and 'guests and servers'. Then we would talk about what it does to your body and how it feels; what is the relationship, and when do you feel you can make eye contact and when you can't. It meant that for some of the white actors, who might not

have experienced that in real life, they were able to explore it. It meant that the Black actors who did experience that in real life were able to take it away from their own experience in terms of race, at least in the exercise, and then talk about it. I wanted to create an environment where – the white actors who needed this information in order to portray the characters well – the Black actors weren't required to teach and explain this all the time. It created a way for us to have those conversations without particular people feeling responsible. We spent a lot of time finding ways to get them to play the status and the power of it before we sort of 'segregated' the cast.

There's another thing that is tricky about the play *Noughts and Crosses* is that typically we want to side with the oppressed or the underdog, the side-lined or the marginalised when we're reading stories. We sort of culturally understand that we're meant to root for those people. What that means on a practical level is that you have this odd thing where you have this company of Black actors, who so rarely get to be represented in this way, watch their experience be played out by people who aren't them. It's not a problem, but it's an odd quandary to find yourself in, in the same way that reading the story is made safer for me, as a Black woman, because it's not playing out my body. The flip side of that is that the celebration of the work is also going to be on the white actors.

Q: What was key in working with other members of the creative team?
TC: Joshua Pharo (lighting designer) was really interested in a few things. The play moves from location to location really quickly and we talked a lot in the creative team about wanting the pace to move at TikTok speed, like you could almost swipe your thumb to take you to the next scene. Josh had this cool concept of lines on the floor. Lines would light up to define smaller spaces. There are a few big public scenes: the courthouse, the public execution and the beach, these big expansive places. But mostly the scenes are in little corners, classrooms and kitchens. So Josh created these shapes on the floor that could suddenly mean that, even though you're on the whole expanse of the Open Air Theatre stage, the actors would feel like they were in a tiny kitchen. We did a lot of work trying to work out how to locate them, very quickly, so that the audience would understand that they'd moved location and what that location felt like in terms of the freedom, or lack, of movement within it.

Max Pappenheim (sound designer) was working on ways to flow into the next

scene or finding ways to make everything feel like a runaway train. Once they kiss there's no way out, we're on a runaway train until the end. It keeps escalating and escalating, especially in the second act. What happens to Callum and Sephy is out of their control, the action and emotionally, it's out of their control. Then there were moments like the explosion, when you don't have lights in the matinee, that needed to be really loud and believable.

Ingrid Mackinnon (movement director) is a genius. Ingrid and I did a lot of work, before we went into rehearsals, about the company being on stage all the time. There were also moments that I wanted to happen visually: a letter we see travelling or watching the kids putting on their school uniforms for the first time, and some shapes that I knew I wanted to make. Ingrid led some of the 'predator and prey' exercises with the actors moving like animals – what was it like to move like a predator or prey? – which was really useful because it distanced it from being a person. Ingrid found ways for the actors to get into their bodies and find rhythms or ways to move that connected with how it felt, for example, if you don't ever have to worry that the police are going to stop you, and if you know that you have enough money what would that do to your shoulders? And if the opposite was true, what would that do to your shoulders? Thinking about how fast is your heartbeat when you walk down the street when people think you don't belong or when you know you belong. Ingrid did a lot of very specific work about how it felt to be a nought or a Cross before even thinking about the characters. Then we started to think about how you would sit and what your posture would be like. And when everyone got onto the set, the way that you lean on the scaffold and the buildings changes if you feel like you own the place or if you don't or if you're exhausted or if you're not. That informed lots of other things.

We also created some set pieces: the scene where Sephy is lost in the forest and the sex scene, which is a big moment in the show. It's written in a really interesting way, they're both describing what happened in the past tense, and it's open to interpretation as to how explicitly or implicitly you create that scene. Ingrid led the work on the sex scene, ensuring that the actors weren't vulnerable on stage but finding a balance to make it true and intimate, and risky and romantic. Particularly on the scale of the Open Air Theatre stage, it had to feel real. Thinking about the poetic nature of the way that it was written, we had Callum and Sephy walking towards each other with a lot of eye contact, and every touch was really significant because they don't touch that much before this moment. I was really proud of that bit because I was anxious

about it going into rehearsals. I think it is beautifully written and I really valued that if you were a young person reading a book that had a sex scene in it, that it might be the first one you ever read. I think it's handled really well, so I wanted to match that in the way that we did it on stage. We spent a lot of time talking about it because there's a lot of things going on in that scene. Ingrid managed it so beautifully and did incredible work with the two actors: what they were comfortable and felt safe to do, giving them a language to say when they didn't feel safe – sometimes, even when someone gives you permission to say no to an idea, you still feel the pressure to do it. They had lots of escape cords they could pull at any point, ways to stop. Ingrid made sure it was specifically choreographed, like a fight scene or a dance, so that they were both really safe, and that it was truthful. That it would make sense if you were sat at the back of the auditorium or on the front row.

Q: What should teachers think about when directing this play?
TC: The important thing is to create, and be really careful and mindful about how you set up those first rehearsals. What are those first and second days or sessions, in terms of the way that people talk about race, about segregation and talk about oppression and power. Not to be nervous about them because that's what the play is about. To set useful ground rules in the way that with a youth company, you sometimes make a contract of how we talk about the piece and to each other.

Don't discount the Hadleys and their scenes as being perfunctory rich people scenes, because actually the Hadley scenes are really great. They're easy to skim over because they sound like they're not saying anything, and then you read them again, you go, oh, they've got everything.

A lot of what you're living in Noughts and Crosses is they're about to kiss or about to fight, the play is full of these moments of tension. I think that's where a lot of the drama is. All the stuff that leads up to the bomb going off and stuff that leads up to the executions, that's where the really fun stuff is. You can be quite expansive about how you play it.

Noughts and Crosses is published by Nick Hern Books. More information about the play can be found on the Black Plays Archive website.

Interview with Ingrid Mackinnon

Movement director Ingrid Mackinnon talks about working on *Noughts and Crosses* for the 2025 production at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre. This interview was conducted specifically for this resource by mezze eade in 2026.

Q: How did you feel when you first read the book?
Ingrid Mackinnon (IM): I actually never read the book. It didn't cross my path as a young person growing up in Canada but I had heard of it. I did see the TV series though. I tend to work with the adaptation that we're going to put onstage if I'm unfamiliar with a story because that is what I have to work with.

Q: How would you define movement direction?
IM: Movement direction helps to shape storytelling through the body. It can be seen in the embodiment of a character and also in the physical language of a production.

Q: How does your training and experience as a dancer inform your practice?
IM: I started dancing really young and continued on to have a professional performance career, so I always think about movement in terms of dance. I may not express that with the actors that I work with, but it's the way that I see the world, it's kind of in my bones. I think it helps me think quickly (dancers are trained to process physical information at pace) which can be very helpful in a collaborative setting when everyone is eager to lift an idea off the page or out of your head and get it on its feet.

Q: What was key in your preparation for working on play?
IM: Listening to music. I make personal playlists for every production that I work on.

Q: Were there any useful games or exercises you used with the company during rehearsals?
IM: I was eager to bring laughter into the room whenever possible so we would sometimes play musical chairs as a warm up. We also explored some more abstract and expressionistic movement in the first week to help make physical discoveries about our Noughts and Crosses world.

Q: Were there any major challenges and how did you solve them?

IM: Not really, only the usual challenges of working in the Open Air! How to keep everyone present and engaged when the sun was beating down on their heads on a matinee wearing a costume!

Q: What advice would you give a teacher directing this play?
IM: I would suggest that you begin with structured conversations about the themes of the play because once you begin to truthfully embody the world that Malorie Blackman imagined in *Noughts and Crosses* where the power dynamics are different from what we have say here in the UK for example, the message will be clearer and hopefully more impactful.

Themes

Power

Power can be described as the ways in which people or groups are able to act and have influence over or impact other people or groups through their action(s) and decisions. Power gives individuals, groups and organisations the authority to control or influence other individuals, groups or organisations, in positive and negative ways.

Three years before the play begins Meggie is working as a nanny for the Hadley family. Jasmine was having an affair and needed Meggie to lie to Kamal, placing Meggie in a 'catch 22' situation – she will lose whatever happens. Jasmine was unreasonable and punished Meggie for her mistake because she is a Nought. If Meggie had realised and lied for Jasmine she would then have been in a position of fearing what might happen if Kamal found out that she had lied to him.

- Jasmine Hadley uses her power to fire Meggie McGregor and prevent her from working for another Cross family, and she uses it to pay for a solicitor to defend Ryan McGregor. Find examples in the play of when characters use their power for the benefit or detriment of another character.

Race

In our most recent history, as humans, power has become based on the possession of land and property, control of natural resources and ownership of saleable products or stocks for profit. Since the 17th century white European countries sought to build this type of power on a global scale, and since the end of the 19th century many white people have worked to retain this power for only white people. In order to build and maintain such power white people have enacted processes of dehumanisation on Black and global majority people and created a narrative to justify these acts of oppression: Race, an ideological construct that benefits white people.

- What is race? Reflect and discuss in relation to humans, what is meant by the term race and what does it mean to you?

It has often been assumed that physical difference among people must map onto different spectra of ability, or even destructively, of superiority and inferiority. This had proven to not be the case. Within particular societies, geographical origin may generally correlate with social or economic disadvantage, and thus with educational or economic achievement but when nonbiological influences are factored out, the correlation disappears. What is important here is historical factors, not biological ones.

Understanding Race by Rob Desalle and Ian Tattersall (2022)

The idea of a racial hierarchy, or differences in human worth, based on biological features such as skin tone, hair texture, skull shape etc enabled white people to attach positive qualities – intelligence, beauty and enlightened – to whiteness and negative qualities – laziness, stupidity and aggression – to Black people. These ideas became ingrained, through stereotypes, in white people's beliefs about themselves and about Black people and were implemented in education settings, and reinforced through social dynamics and institutions.

Dionne: ...They smell funny and they eat weird food... (Act one, scene seven, page 33)

Lola: ...Blank minds which can't hold a single, original thought. (Act one, scene seven, page 34)

- Find other examples of stereotypes about Noughts in the play. How are they used to represent how white people maintain superiority and power?
- Research how these relate to stereotypes and tropes about Black people in our society.

Shania: They don't sell pink plasters. Only dark brown ones. (Act one, scene six, page 28)

- Research the different ways in which racial discrimination happens in Black people's everyday lives. Eg it can still be difficult to find plasters in a range of different skin tones and schools and workplaces do not always ensure they have a range of skin tone plasters. How does this impact a person's sense of inclusion and belonging?



Callum (Richard Madden), Shania (Jenny Ogilvie), Colin (Christopher Daley) and Sephy (Ony Uhiara) in Noughts and Crosses. *Photo by Keith Pattison © RSC.*

The belief in a racial hierarchy manifests as racism, a complex system of individual beliefs and social structures which work in a cycle with systemic racism – the practices of organisations, institutions and cultures – and are embedded in everyday life, across all aspects of society. A dissonance is created by the denial of racism existing in Britain and the need to believe that our society is post-racial. This dissonance is a distraction which has enabled racism to become a permanent feature of our society. So permanent that people don't always realise what beliefs they have absorbed and how they enact and perpetuate racism.

Sephy: Worse than animals! Like blankers! (Act one, scene three, page 21)

- Discuss the impact of Sephy's use of a racial slur on Noughts and on Callum.

Language is a powerful tool for creating identity and making or breaking our sense of worth. Derogatory descriptions and stereotypes deliberately disempower individuals or groups and racial slurs cause pain and harm. Verbal abuse happens in any relationship, perpetrated by strangers, colleagues and friends. Some people – like Joanne, Dionne and Lola – intentionally use racist language knowing that they will not or cannot be held accountable. Racist language and slurs express what a person thinks about a global majority ethnic

group and are often not addressed, either because the victim is powerless to respond or forced to be complicit with their own oppression. If addressed, perpetrators will often excuse their harmful action as unintentional, misunderstood or as a joke or mistake, because they are unable to navigate the discomfort of acknowledging how they contribute to the system of racism – and of how they benefit from it.

Socialized into a deeply internalized sense of superiority that we either are unaware of or can never admit to ourselves, we become highly fragile in our conversations about race. We consider a challenge to our worldviews as a challenge to our very identities as good, moral people.

White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo (2018)

When Callum and Sephy meet on the beach, after Callum's first day at Heathcroft, Sephy centres her own comfort over recognising the harm she has caused to Callum and his needs. Sephy coerces him into making her feel comfortable, rather than reflecting on her own ignorance about racism and the discrimination Callum experiences; why she used a racial slur and does not acknowledge the power she holds in their relationship and in society.

Sephy: Sticks and stones, Callum. It's one word, that's all.

Callum: If you'd 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. (Act one, scene four, page 22)

- Research the term 'white fragility' and find other moments in the play where Sephy and other Cross characters display it. How are these moments used to present power and control over the Noughts?

Retaining power and sustaining the system of racism also requires the policing of white people, forcing them to conform with expected behaviours. Challenges to the dominant ideology by white people are shut down, ridiculed and may be punished.

- Who and how do different Cross characters do this to Sephy?



Lola (Halle Brown), Sephy (Corinna Brown) and Joanne (Helena Pipe) in Noughts and Crosses *at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre in 2025. Photo by Manuel Harlan.*

Inequality

Inequality is a legacy of the enslavement of African people and is purposefully perpetuated by systems of power and people who are socialised to maintain those systems. This socialisation happens in families, schools and communities and can be reinforced in our workplaces and by the press and media. These ideas and processes have been regularly supported by politicians and government.

Despite different reform acts to increase accessibility for all children, educational institutions have been an integral part of maintaining inequality in Britain. Since the 1950s, schools and universities have implicitly upheld the idea of a racial hierarchy and practised harmful discrimination and exclusion of Black and global majority people.

Time period	Event
1950s	Black teachers from the Caribbean were refused positions in British schools because their training was viewed as being of a lower standard, despite it being delivered across the Caribbean by white British trained educators.
1960s	The Black Education Movement set up supplementary Saturday schools to address the lack of Black history and literature taught in British schools, to counter the negative representations of Black people in textbooks and to address the low self-esteem caused by the racist behaviour of white students and teachers. Councils across the UK recommended that the number of global majority children (at that time meaning immigrants from Commonwealth countries) in UK schools should not exceed 30 per cent.
1970s	Black children were considered to be 'educationally subnormal' and were sent to special primary and secondary schools where they were categorised as having a moderate or severe learning disability or being 'unteachable'.
1980s	Whilst Margaret Thatcher was prime minister, Black children, particularly Black boys, were labelled as problematic underachievers. Textbooks still contained stereotypical views of African people and excluded Black history, they also continued the narrative that Britain's colonisation of African and Caribbean countries was positive for and benevolent towards African and African diasporic people.
1990s	When the Labour party came into power the idea of a meritocratic society where anyone could go to university, obtain a well-paid job and live a comfortable life ignored the economic and social barriers that global majority ethnic groups faced and cemented the existing advantages of white, generally middle and upper class, families and children.

Callum: Being in and being accepted are two different things (Act one, scene one, page 8)



The Ensemble cast in Noughts and Crosses. *Photo by Keith Pattison © RSC.*

In 1985, an investigation led by Lord Swan confirmed that structural racism in British schools significantly disadvantaged Black children and perpetuated the myth that they were less intelligent than white children. This was embedded and executed through 'the persistence of racist stereotypes, biased IQ tests, a deep misunderstanding of culture and language, and biases in teacher expectations, disciplinary practices and curriculum content'.

When the novel *Noughts and Crosses* was published in 2001 very little had changed in schools across the UK.

Why isn't it gross misconduct when a Cross does it? ... Expelled or what the authorities euphemistically called 'excluded', for those things which would get Crosses detention or a severe telling off. Noughts and Crosses (the novel), page 256.

- Discuss whether the experiences of Black students have changed or improved since 2001. What has changed and not changed? (Read the Runneymede report).

In the Channel 4 documentary *The School That Tried to End Racism* (2020), a psychologist defines white privilege as '...the absence of having to live with the

consequences of racism'.

Callum: Noughts-only schools have no computers, hardly any books. My maths class last year had 40 students. How many would you have at Heathcroft?

Sephy: I dunno. Around 15. (Act one, scene one, page 9)

- Watch this clip from the documentary programme *The School That Tried to End Racism* (2020): youtube.com/watch?v=1l3wJ7pJUjg

- Find examples of limited access to or exclusion from education for Noughts in the play. How does this affect Lynette, Jude and Callum's prospects in life? How does it limit the choices they have and how they make them?

Limited access to education, experience of poor education or experiences of discrimination from teachers greatly impacts access to opportunities beyond secondary education. Even with the required academic qualifications, global majority ethic groups have been made to believe they are not good enough to apply to study at a university or gain a career in 'traditional' professions. Less than one per cent of professors at UK universities are Black.

Despite the Race Relations Amendment Act of 1968, which outlawed racial discrimination in employment, Black people have still been excluded when applying for jobs; application forms from candidates with African or 'Black' names are discarded without being considered and qualified black candidates have deliberately not been offered jobs. According to a report published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in February 2026, the level of racial ethnic discrimination in recruitment has not decreased in the UK over the last 40 years and that Black people with degrees earn significantly less that white workers. When Black applicants are given a job, many appointments are tokenism: the Black person's ideas are ignored, they are shutdown in meetings and passed over for promotion whilst being expected to make the organisation look diverse and seem inclusive. Black people endure racial microaggressions and discrimination from colleagues and members of the public throughout their careers.

A high standard of education and a well-paid job does not protect Black people

from legal injustices. In England and Wales, Black people are four times more likely than white people to be stopped and searched by the police. Black people are more likely to be given a prison sentence and on average serve longer sentences than white people. Global majority ethnic groups make up over a quarter of the prison population in England and Wales – if this was correlated to the actual representation in the population of England and Wales, 18 per cent, there would be 9,000 fewer global majority ethnic people in prison.

The barriers to education and work also impact where people can afford to live – usually in urban and rural areas that are underfunded and under-resourced – and their access to health services and transport.

- Research why companies such as the Safe Bus company were needed in America. In the novel, Callum walks everywhere, including the miles to and from Sephy's house, whilst Sephy is driven everywhere she needs to be. What other inequalities are spoken about or represented in the play? Is Sephy aware of the inequalities Callum and other Noughts experience?

Resistance and freedom

Civil resistance is a long-established means for oppressed groups of people to fight for their human rights to be recognised and upheld. Dependent on the position of the perceiver, the fight for these rights can be viewed as a justified objection to authoritarianism or rebellion, sometimes terrorism, against those who believe that they have the right to power and to rule. The historical and current social and political contexts and the condition of the oppressed will influence whether resistance is non-violent or violent.

Non-violent resistance includes protests and marches, strikes or boycotting organisations and services and petitioning those in power. The effectiveness of non-violent protests often requires the oppressed to show proof of their suffering – free slaves were pressured into showing the scars on their backs from being whipped – placing them in a vulnerable position and causing more harm. Non-violent resistance usually requires a critical mass of people to begin to affect those with direct control of or who benefit from the systems of oppression. Minorities can be coerced to conform, whereas majorities embody a force of power that cannot be ignored.

Violent resistance includes some form of physical attack on a person or groups

of people who are responsible for the oppression and those who may not have direct control but do benefit from the status quo. Significant places and locations can also be targeted and damaged without harming any people. Violent acts can be carried out by individuals, separate groups or large groups of people, in all instances the impact of the violence is not reliant on the number of people involved.

When there is no justice for groups of oppressed people, for many, active resistance feels like the only option to be listened to and for society and government to change. However, the choice to engage in any form of resistance is always overshadowed by the possible repercussions enacted by the people who hold the power. In South Africa and America peaceful protest by oppressed groups of people were met with violent punishment from their oppressors – beatings, torture, hanging, water-canons, tear gas – the list of atrocities is very long. Repeated humiliation, and the trauma of repeated discrimination, can make a person to feel like they have no other option but to participate in acts of resistance. Not engaging in resistance can make it difficult for a person to reconcile their inaction with their sense of identity.

Meggie: All those people killed and maimed and that's the excuse you have to offer.

Ryan: How many millions of Nought lives have been destroyed by the Crosses over centuries? No number of people killed in a shopping centre can ever pay for that.

Meggie: These are human beings you're talking about.

Ryan: We're in a state of war Meggie, it wasn't the Noughts who started it.

Meggie: You've been brainwashed.

Ryan: No, you're the one who's been brainwashed. By the telly and the radio and the newspapers. It's alright for them to use violence when they please, to keep us in poverty and bleed us dry. Why when we fight back, they call us cowardly and barbaric. (Act one, scene 21, page 79)

- Discuss why Meggie chooses not to join the Liberation Milita and why Ryan does.
- How is Jude humiliated and why does he feel powerless? How does this influence his choice to join the Liberation Militia?
- Discuss the moral dilemma of violent resistance. Does the violence of the oppressor justify the violence of the oppressed? If non-violent methods to address inequality are ignored, what happens?
- Discuss how people with shared experiences of discrimination have different needs and opinions of how inequality should be addressed.



The cast of Noughts and Crosses *at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre in 2025. Photo by Manuel Harlan.*

The Crosses in Albion do not recognise the Noughts as equal and valid citizens, mirroring the treatment of South Africans by the white British and white Afrikaners and of African American people by white people in the United States. The segregation in Albion echoes Apartheid South Africa and the campaign for Noughts to attend Cross schools reflects the persistence of African American children and parents to attend white schools in the segregated southern states of America.

- Watch the Hidden History of Brown vs Board of Education (youtube.com/watch?v=VnQYYm-2nsg). Research similar resistance movements in the UK.
- Research Mildred and Richard Loving. Use their relationship to explore

how Callum and Sephy's love is a form of resistance.

Agency and consequence

When we grow up, most people have agency to choose how they spend their day-to-day lives. We learn this from our parents, care givers, and our teachers. In safe environments, such as the home Sephy lives in, we might find that there are limited consequences for mistakes. In unsafe environments, like the Albion society is for Callum, the consequences for mistakes or actions may greatly change a person's circumstances. Our teenage years are typically the time when we explore our understanding of the world, determine our individual political affiliations and social dynamics, and find out how much control we have over our lives

The novel and the play adaptation of *Noughts and Crosses* reflects how young people are restricted by the decisions made by the adults around them as well as the social constraints acting upon those adults.

Callum: Good or bad, every aspect of my life lay in the hands of others. Kelani Adams; the teachers at Heathcroft; now the jury. (Act two, scene six, page 102)

However, while Callum and Sephy lack control, they do have the ability and the opportunity to make some choices; Callum and Sephy choose to remain friends and continue to see each other after Meggie is sacked. There are no significant consequences to this decision until Callum attends the same school as Sephy. Sephy chooses to be seen with Callum in public places (in the novel, when they visit Celebration Park, Sephy's father's status and power protect Callum from the police but not from psychological harm) regardless of what could happen to either of them. This protection lasts until Callum attends Heathcroft. Yet, as director Tinuke Craig points out, once Callum and Sephy kiss, at the beginning of the story, every choice they make has repercussions, raising the stakes of their next decision, and their relationship.

- Make a list of either Callum or Sephy's decisions and the positive and negative consequences of them (eg Sephy sits with Callum at lunch and she is later beaten by other Crosses). You could do this for all the characters.

- In the novel, Sephy decides to go to Chivers Boarding School. In the play (act two, scene 11), Jasmine and Kamal decide to send Sephy to Chivers. While this doesn't affect the plot, discuss how this change impacts Sephy's character (note how she is portrayed and perceived).

- Inaction is also a choice. Find moments in the play where different characters take no action, what are the results of their inaction (Eg Sephy does not write to Callum until the end of the summer holiday).



The cast of Noughts and Crosses *at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre in 2025. Photo by Manuel Harlan.*

Exploring challenging themes

Before exploring the play with you students, reflect on the following questions:

- What do you know and understand about the historic oppression of marginalised groups and ongoing discrimination? Are you aware of the positive and negative qualities attached to different groups?

- What do you not understand about the historic oppression of marginalised groups and ongoing discrimination? Do you understand how the white identity is valued and how this perpetuates racism?

- How might the historic oppression and ongoing discrimination impact your students? How might a person's identity affect their sense of safety in the classroom?

When working with your students:

- Signal difficult topics with sensitivity. Give students time to prepare or ask questions or share concerns.

- Communicate and repeat that students can ask questions and share concerns.

- Set up a framework for discussion, e.g. be curious and open; share ideas without causing harm; be clear on how you will address discriminatory speech or behaviour.

- Ensure that no one individual or group feels pressured to be the spokesperson for their race, ethnicity or religion or any aspect of their identity.

- Anticipate a range of unexpected reactions.

Prepare to respond with compassion and create space for healing and reflection (be aware of the impact of your emotions on you and your students and how your experience and knowledge gaps shape your response).

Exercises

Shoaling

Before leading this exercise with your students, identify the words which you would like to use and/or ask your students to share in response to reading the play or novel. Use these words as well as or instead of the words listed in the description of the exercise.

After each section of the exercise, ask students to reflect on how it felt or looked, what they found effective and how they can use the exercise to enhance scenes or create transitions between scenes in the play.

Part one: Ask your students to get into a circle. Starting with one student, a movement will be copied and travel clockwise around the circle getting bigger with each person. When it is at its maximum size, the next person will begin a new movement. Encourage students to do abstract or gestural movement rather than 'moves' from social media. Encourage students to play with levels and directions. After the group has explored at least five different movements, ask students to respond to the following words: **watched**, **isolated**, **escape**, **hate**, and **power**.

Part two: Split your students into two groups, one group will watch whilst the other group participates in the exercise. Then the groups will swap and the exercise repeated with the second group.

Ask the students to get into a clump, all facing the same direction, as close to one another as possible. Ask the person at the front of the group to begin walking at an even pace around the room (they should avoid walking in circles), the rest of the group should follow, remaining close and maintaining their positions in the clump. Ask the person at the front to repeat the same movement as they walk around the space, the rest of the group should copy the movement as exactly as possible and at the same time as the leader. The group should feel that they are moving as one. After at least one minute, ask the group to stop and for everyone to turn on the spot 180 or 360 degrees, this should give the group a new leader. This person should begin walking and do a new movement, copied by the rest of the group. Repeat this a few times. You can do this exercise allowing the students to decide when they will stop and

randomly find a new leader. Encourage students to work as an ensemble, creating a connection so that, as a group, they flow around the space. Their purpose is to move 'as one'.

Part three: Working with both groups in the space continue the exercise asking the leaders to create movement which embodies or represents the following words: **jury**, **shoppers**, **police**, **mourners**, and **protestors**.

Encourage the students to play with the levels, tempo and the directions of their movement. You can also ask students to add a sound or word that can be repeated with the movement. What happens if one person does a different movement or gesture? How long do they continue and does anyone else join them? The whole group cannot join in with the different movement, there must be contrast or opposition in the group. They cannot continue the different movement for more than 30 seconds. What happens if one person leaves the group, either stopping or moving away from the group? What happens if they continue the same movement or if they choose to do a different movement? They cannot stay separate for more than one minute and must return to the group.

Part four: Give the groups opposite words. They cannot physically touch each other, but explore what happens when they cross paths. A group might stop, change direction or split up around the other group and come back together once they have passed one another. Use the following words: **Police and Protestor**, **Politician and Citizen**, and **Rich and Poor**.

Improvisation

In groups of four or five, imagine you are a family who is oppressed by the government and living in a segregated society. One family member has joined a non-violent resistance group and during dinner tries to persuade other family members to join the group. At some point another family member reveals that they have participated in violent resistance.

Subtext

Working in pairs, use Sephy's act one, scene nine, page 38 monologue or Callum's act one, scene 14, page 55 monologue.

1. Ask one student to read the monologue out loud and the other student to make notes: what is happening, what is unsaid and what does the character want etc.

2. Repeat the exercise swapping roles, the reader now takes notes and the note taker now reads.

3. Give your students time to share their notes and discuss the character. What do they know about the character and what would they like to know.

4. The first reader will read the monologue out loud, pausing after each punctuation mark. The other student will vocalise the character's internal thought or feeling. Encourage students to work slowly and find truthful responses. If there is time, ask the students to swap and repeat the exercise.

5. Give the students time to think about how they would present the monologue (without the subtext) to an audience. Remind them that these monologues should be delivered as direct address. Discuss what was challenging and what was useful for the students. What did they discover about the character.

6. If you have completed the shoaling exercise with your students, match pairs with the same monologue to create groups of at least six. How can they use the exercise to build the scene: is the character aware of the ensemble, do they interact and how does the scene end.

7. If your students are confident ask them to share their scenes.

Objectives

Students can work solo or in pairs. You can focus on act one or act two or the whole play. Ask students to choose a character or allocate a character.

1. Ask your students to read each scene and decide what is the character's main objective in each scene – what do they want?

2. Ask your students to look at their list of objectives, what does it tell them about the character's journey through the play? Are the objectives generally the same or do they significantly change? Ask them how the objectives can inform how a character might be portrayed in each scene.

3. Working in pairs, ask or allocate a scene with two characters. The pairs should find a space and face each other about two metres apart. Thinking about their character's objective, before they speak their lines they must take a small step towards or away from the other character. When they have finished ask them to reflect on how this influences the way the character speaks.

4. Repeat the exercise, this time responding to what the other character has said – moving after they have spoken. They should still think about their character's objective. You can add the option that a character does not move. Ask them to reflect on how this influences the dynamics of the relationship.

5. Give your students time, using what they have discovered to rehearse a more realistic version of the scene. If your students are confident, ask them to share their scenes.

Discussions

1. Listen to the Race Relations episode of the *What Really Happened in the Nineties* podcast. Discuss the events and ideas explored in the podcast. How are they represented or reflected upon in the play?

   BBC SOUNDS Podcast: *What Really Happened in the Nineties – Race Relations*
   bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0017459

2. What are the similarities between segregation in America and Apartheid in South Africa? Discuss how these systems are rooted in ideas about racial hierarchy and the impact they have on today's society.

3. Discuss the differences between the published text and the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre production and why the writer and director chose to make these changes.

Useful links

African National Congress – ANC history
anc1912.org.za/history/

America's Black Holocaust Museum – Jim Crow
abhmuseum.org/the-five-pillars-of-jim-crow/

Anti-Apartheid Legacy – A Short History of Apartheid
antiapartheidlegacy.org.uk/heritage-arts-culture/history/apartheid-a-short-history/

Apartheid Museum – Understanding Apartheid
apartheidmuseum.org/uploads/files/Resources/learners-Book/learners-book-understanding-apartheid-full.pdf

Black History Month – Brown vs Board of Education
blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/civil-rights-movement/defiant-steps-forward-the-little-rock-nine-and-their-indelible-mark-on-civil-rights-history/

The Hidden History of Brown vs Board of Education
youtube.com/watch?v=VnQYYm-2nsg

Black Past – The Safe Bus Company
blackpast.org/african-american-history/groups-organizations/safe-bus-company-1926-1972/

BBC Adaptation of *Noughts and Crosses* – Cast Interviews
bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/ox/

BBC – Educationally Subnormal Schools
bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57099654

bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/articles/zhsxqfr

BBC – Black Codes
bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zn4xkmn/revision/5

Cain Ulster – Omagh Bomb 1998
cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/omagh/events.htm

Facing History and Ourselves – Africans Resist White Control
facinghistory.org/resource-library/africans-resist-white-control

Gilder Lehrman Institute – The Power of Nonviolent Resistance in the Civil Rights Movement
gilderlehrman.org/ap-african-american-studies/unit-4/black-organizing-twentieth-century/power-nonviolent-resistance-civil-rights-movement

Joseph Rowntree Foundation – Ethnicity, Poverty and In-Work Inequalities in the UK
jrf.org.uk/race-and-ethnicity/ethnicity-poverty-and-in-work-inequalities-in-the-uk

Malorie Blackman *Noughts and Crosses* Q&A
malorieblackman.co.uk/news/noughts-and-crosses-qa

National Museum of African American History and Culture – The Little Rock Nine
nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/little-rock-nine

National Museum of African American History and Culture – Segregation in Transportation
searchablemuseum.com/segregation-in-transportation/

Pilot Theatre – *Noughts and Crosses* Teaching Pack
pilot-theatre.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Multidisciplllnary-framework-Noughts-and-Crosses_O3-FINAL.pdf

RUNNYMEDE TRUST – Dear Stephen Lawrence
cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/64415d79ee634162e3f4b6d1_Stephen%20Lawrence%20ChillCreate%20Presentation%20Look%20%26%20Feel%20Vis3-min.pdf

SARI – The Legacy of Stephen Lawrence
saricharity.org.uk/news/the-legacy-of-stephen-lawrence/

Guardian – Stop and Search Tribunal
theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/sep/27/black-athlete-recounts-traumatic-police-stops-at-officers-misconduct-tribunal

The School That Tried to End Racism – What We Learned
tes.com/magazine/archive/school-tried-end-racism-what-we-learned

Women's History – Ruby Bridges
womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/ruby-bridges

West End Best Friend – Interview with Jessica Layde: Minerva
westendbestfriend.co.uk/news/interview-jessica-layde-minerva-noughts-and-crosses

YouTube – First African American Patent Holders
youtube.com/watch?v=0wECmqBQIM0&list=PLsB1WO8xAXzyMz4BihC_6a07RZummkGza&index=35

Thank you

This Teachers' Educational Resource Pack was written by mezze eade, 2026.