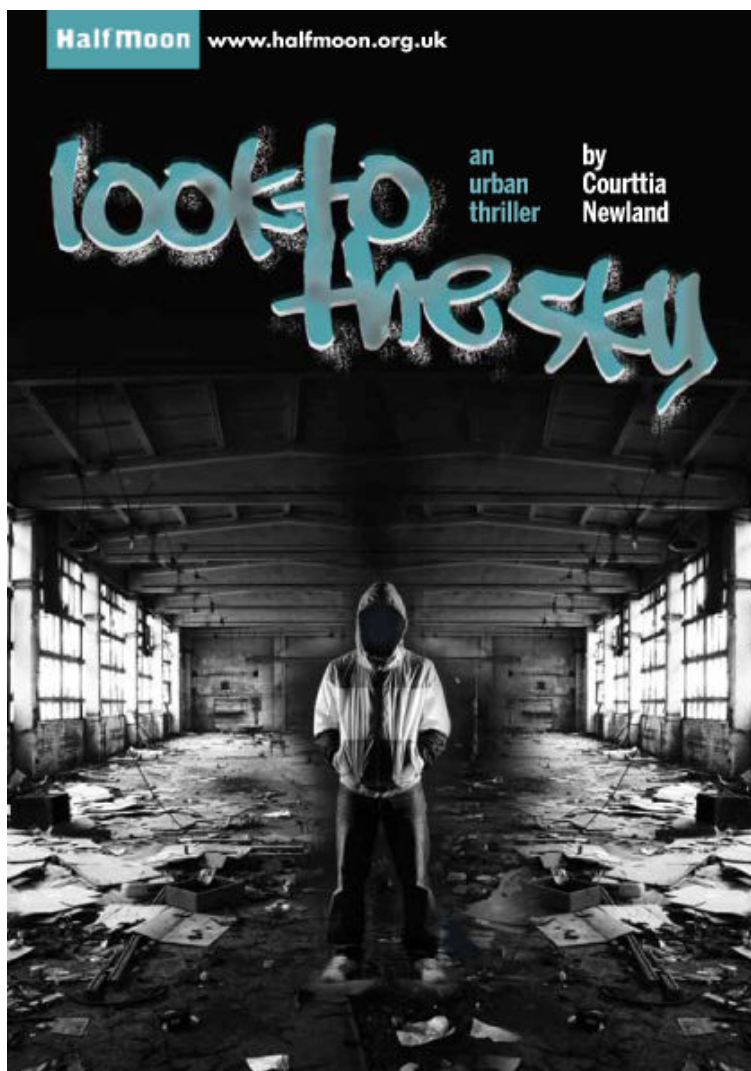


Halfmoon

RESOURCE PACK



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About Half Moon

How to use this pack:

This resource pack has been compiled to support the Half Moon production of *Look To The Sky* by Courttia Newland, touring nationally during the Autumn of 2011. It's designed to support the study and exploration of the production, for example as part of a Key Stage 3/4 course of study in Drama or for general use.

Background

Look To The Sky has been developed as a piece of new work for young audiences through Half Moon's flagship *Exchange for Change* artform development programme. We began working with the writer Courttia Newland in 2010, supporting him through a research and development process which involved him working with groups of 14 – 16 year olds in East London schools and presenting a work-in-progress performance to a 'conference' of Theatre for Young People specialists at a one day festival event. Since that day, we are delighted to have been able to develop this into a full touring production and to share it with you.

The pack is divided into four sections:

- Notes of the Creative Process
- Extracts from the Script
- Exercises for Performance
- Exercises for Exploring the Issues within the play

Notes of the Creative Process

You will find contributions from the creative team, including notes from the writer, director, designer and composer. Each has shared elements of their creative process and responses to working on the production, giving a valuable insight into the respective theatre-making roles. Each set of notes is also accompanied by a specific activity to support learners' understanding of each of these roles and the processes associated with them.

Extracts from the Script

Half Moon has carefully selected key scenes from the script for learners to explore through the exercises. You can also choose to use script extracts as a basis for textual analysis or to workshop, rehearse and present as stand-alone texts for performance.

Each of the extracts can be used for non-gender specific roles and can also be interchanged within the exercises as you would like to use them.

Exercises of Performance

There are a selection of exercises which are designed to encourage an understanding of performance in relation to the play.

Exercises for Exploring the Issues within the Play

There are also some further exercises which you can use to explore the issues of loss and street violence which inform the play. These are creative exercises which encourage learners to engage with the issues from within the play.

NOTES FROM THE CREATIVE TEAM

A Word from the Writer – Courttia Newland

When I joined Half Moon's Exchange for Change artist development programme, my first thought as I started mulling over what I might write, was 'I'm not doing a play about violent youth crime'. This wasn't because I looked down on the subject, or even that I hadn't seen interesting work come out of the exploration of urban youth struggles. It was just that the exploration seemed to only reach so far, and as someone who's best known work was deeply associated with this subject, over a decade ago, I wanted to do something different. I'd always said that if I didn't have anything new to say I wouldn't say anything. I watched the plays, films and TV shows, even helped to produce some of my own. For a number of years what I wrote strayed as far from my comfort zone as I could go. I still wanted to talk about road and present that onto the stage, all the time, but I hadn't found the vehicle to do it.

Then I began to work the Half Moon team and an idea began to form. I believe that creativity blossoms best from individuals when you give no limits. And so, when I was informed that I could do anything I wanted subject-wise, I began to think why not? Originally, I had an idea for a sci-fi piece. I had a long-standing project I'd been working on for a while. Then I began to think, what if you mixed genres? What if I took the basic elements of my sci-fi novel and applied it to the world outside my window? What if I created a theatrical reality that focused not on what we believed young people to be, but like our initial Exchange for Change discussions, on what they were, what *they* believed themselves to be. Their potential. Wouldn't that be closer to the truth? And because I had been like that (admittedly a long time ago) in the sense that I talked that way, dressed that way and *felt* that way before, even while I suspected I was different and had more to say myself, I began to ponder how that could be expressed in theatrical terms, how I could take the essence of who they were and present that on stage.

This, for me, is what I wanted to achieve: an exploration of the psyche behind inner city minds. And as each young person is as individual as a snowflake, there's room for limitless interpretations. I work with the young quite a lot, teaching creative writing in schools, prisons, universities, writing retreats and pupil referral units. I ask if they feel they are represented properly by the media, and none of them, no matter their race or background, have ever said yes. And I think that's a crying shame. I think we're doing our young a major disservice, and in order to understand their minds, we have to *listen*. That's what I'm attempting to do with this play. Listen, hear what they have to say, and then try to communicate with some level of truth and understanding.

Writing Exercise: TWO SIDES TO THE STORY

"Debs: Being there don't make you guilty."

Using Deb's line from the play as a stimulus, write a scene between two characters with opposing opinions. Try reading the lines aloud with a partner, alternating characters.

A Word from the Director - Angela Michaels

Apart from the strength of the story, I was attracted by the writing and the uniqueness of Courttia's - the playwright - voice. His use of rhythm and language bring a tone and richness, which means that the play comes alive in one's imagination, even before the characters are placed on the stage. This play skilfully challenges our perceptions and plays with mystery and ambiguity, leading to an unexpected and climatic finish. It speaks of loss, but there is humour, deals with harsh realities but there is gentleness and introspection.

This piece offers an interesting directorial challenge in the way it is composed of two distinct units. In the second half of the play, we are in the same location, but have moved away from the abstract elements of the first half to a gritty realism. The characters have different names but they retain the qualities of their previous incarnations from part one.

Each of the 'halves' could be performed without the other – so what meaning do they have when placed together. How does one bridge the gap from the first to the second half? What is real and what is imagined? Are we in one of the character's minds, or in two worlds which 'graze' each other, mingling and leaking elements from one to the other? Is it perhaps a cautionary tale from the shadows, from 'ghosts' of young people who have lost out on their lives, on childhood and a future because society has ceased to listen to them? It will mean different things to each audience member and I look forward to the post-show debates.

At the time of writing this, 2 months away from rehearsal, I have just finalised the design with the designer and am still in discussion with the composer for the soundtrack. The actors have been cast and I am forming ideas about the production. This I call the 'gestation' phase. I not only look at the play, but use lots of other stimuli and influences, from going to see plays or dance on related themes (however distantly related), cutting articles out of newspapers, looking at art and film, listening to music. It's a quiet foundation laying process, allowing my creative juices freedom – seeing, hearing, feeling and exploring and questioning.

It will be an ensemble piece, using the actors' physicality to tell the story as much as possible. This is my preferred way of working and the abstracted nature of the first section of the play lends itself to this approach. For the first few days of rehearsal, we will work without the script. This time will be spent finding a physical language between the actors and exploring the themes of the play in discussion and improvisation. We will also look at character, build 'back-stories' and explore and chart each characters emotional journey in detail.

I always start rehearsal with knowledge of the script but not of the outcome. So it's a 'knowing' and 'not knowing'. I'll have soaked up a lot of influences and feel ready to transfer my enthusiasm and understanding of the play to the actors, but I don't have every bit of the play mapped out in my head. Shaping the play happens for me in the rehearsal room. I find the intellectual and creative energy one gets in the rehearsal process invigorating and I want the 'journey' to be interesting for all of us, so my preparation, combined with the work of the ensemble enables us to make discoveries and maybe even create a bit of magic!

Directing Exercise: DIRECTOR'S PROCESS

Choose one of the script extracts and consider this scene in the role of director. What is your initial response? What is the scene about and how can you communicate this with your audience? How should it be presented? Rehearse the scene with actors playing the role and present to the rest of the group.

A Word from the Designer - Naomi Dawson

After an initial chat with the director we decided that a more abstracted and expressionistic set would serve the script better than a naturalistic one. This was due to the dual nature of the piece, the first half is set in an imaginary world, perhaps inside the head of Inno, the missing character. However, because we then go into something realistic we felt that the starting point of our design should be something real, something you would actually find in a derelict warehouse and we would then abstract it or multiply it became an extension of reality. We felt this way we could do something which embraced both worlds.

I started by looking at lots of images of derelict warehouses in and around London. A couple of images really stood out, one in particular of lots of horizontal and vertical scaffolding bars in an empty warehouse making a defined criss-cross pattern silhouetted against a bright window. It had an eerie quality and evoked a space that could perhaps represent the inside of a unhappy mind whilst also giving a sense of deserted warehouse.

I started to base the set on this images, using a similar structure to create levels for the actors; in a relatively confined playing space it felt that it would give us the sense of more space and depth and lead to more exciting staging. We then added a blurred mirror as the back wall to the set. We felt that this really added to the expressionistic side of the what we were trying to convey, it gave the illusion of the warehouse being perhaps endless by the reflective quality but also an enigmatic feel due to the blurred quality. Finally we added a black floor but with some puddles of something very shiny, again this added to the reflective, endless feel but also alluded to dripping water and oil puddles which might be found in a warehouse.

The colours we chose were a very neutral palette, lots of greys, black, dark browns and rust colours; but keeping the palette very limited and cool we hoped that the coloured costume pieces would really stand out and take on greater significance.



The final model box of the set

Design Exercise: DESIGN THE SPACE

- 'Design' and create a performance space by choosing some objects and props (approx 3 – 4) and carefully positioning them within the space. Invite two actors to come in and improvise a scene, responding to your set and placing importance on each object in the space.
- Try changing or moving some the objects and invite the actors to come in and respond. Consider the effect that this has on their scene and on the performance – is there anything you would change?

A Word from the composer – James Grant

In theatre and film music is used to tease out and enhance the dialogue, action and fine details in a scene, not to overshadow them. When I compose music for a show, I like the pieces to be consistent with the story and have a cohesive sound as a body of work. As a composer I first read the script and then brainstorm, noting any musical ideas I envision that will complement and enhance the storyline. To prepare, I listen to a range of styles of artists/music and watch different films as this enables me to 'sync with' and have a 'feel' for the musical elements in different genres for example instrumentation, key, tempo etc.

Look To The Sky is set in a vacant warehouse with characters from the inner city. Initially I wanted to create music that sounded urban & edgy evoking a dark mysterious mood. I built on these early ideas when I met with the director. Together we discussed and developed them birthing a concept that the soundtrack to the story should be urban but rooted in a fusion of atmospheric soundscapes and UKG sub-genres.

Whilst composing for *Look To The Sky*, I listened to a mixture of experimental electronica, dubstep, industrial and ambient music. I worked on pieces for specific parts of the play as highlighted with the director in our meetings, refining the pieces and editing them until we were confident they were seamlessly right for the show. As sometimes happens in theatre, during the rehearsal period, other areas in the play not previously identified to require sound, need sound effects or music in order to 'lift', 'fill' or to help to reinforce the mood. Therefore, as production on the show progresses, I create new pieces, as well as, amending pieces by elongating or shortening them to fit in with the length of the scenes.

Music Exercise: WHAT ARE THE SOUNDS?

Choose one of the script extracts from this pack. Consider the setting, the time, the characters and their emotions and the dialogue work in a small group to make sounds with your own voices to create a 'soundscape' to support the scene. What kind of atmosphere can you create?

You can also add sounds from other sources, such as instruments or sound effects. These can be live or recorded/found sounds.

SCRIPT EXTRACTS

Characters can be played by male or female actors. In the case of monologues or duologues, non-speaking characters can also appear on stage.

Extract 1: Monologue

Obs: [Sighs] A Younger stares up on a bright, sunny day. Looks into the pale blue you describe so well, notices something strange. A bone-white line, curved as if the sky's been stung and they can see bloodless flesh beneath. It takes a moment to register but finally the Younger realizes, what they see is the moon. In broad daylight! And they've never seen it before. Then the reality comes crashing down, I know because it happened to me; the moon and sun are there *all the time*. They don't go away, swap places. They don't hide in some hole. They're always there, even when we don't think about them. And the Younger sees that most people live without even looking up. He wants to show them what they've missed, show the world. He wants to point, shout, but nobody cares. Are you saying that child is wrong to look to the sky? To want to see?

Extract 2: Monologue

Inno: Maybe? If? Probably? I see hope. Hiya, hope! How are you? He looks funny, like a pixie or gnome. She's callin. Says come on, what you waitin for! I dunno. Walk. Hold hand. Clean sheet fingers, cosy, soft. *(gasps)* We're going! Up, up! Past buildings, past birds. Past rain and clouds, past blue sky. Past dark sky, up to the stars. Past crackling fire, satellites and then! *(long pause)* Floating. Like Indian Ocean, bathwater. Can't feel legs or arms. Can't feel fingers or toes. Can't feel. Am I? Is it? Not Sure. Where's Sure? Can't find her. Love her. Hold her. Can't see. *(gasps again)* Fallin! Too fast, too soon. *Sure! Save me, please! Come save me!* I need you! *Help!* *(stiffens, another long pause. Giggles, relaxes. Smiles)* Something smells good, real good! *(sniffs the air)* Hungry man! Follow my nose innit! Garlic, chilli, fresh herbs, onion. Little pasta shells like sea creatures. Eyes water! Mouth waters! Mum's here! Hi mum! Thanks a lot, how you eatin with us? Sweet sweetcorn. Seeds stuck in yuh teeth. Crush for bitter taste. Laughter. Family. Fun. *(pause)* Playing out. Cut grass. Sweat. Burning legs. The best cross ever, ball curves slow, forever, falls at his feet. He's running, past one, past two, shoots, scores! Screaming. Warm hands on back. Nice one. Nice. *(pause)* Spring Fair. Waltzers, toffee apples. Music rumbles in chest. Rainbow ribbons catch sun, thick hair, skinny legs. Pretty girls. Soapy when you get too close, hold hands. Dimples. Smiles. Runnin. After her. Hugging. Clean like new trainers. Squeeze and hold tight. Hold tight, look up. Smoky white lines, empty sky. Hot sun. Buzzing flies. Sugar sweet candyfloss, popcorn, cherry red dummies. *(big smile as if he's stepped into a warm bath, long*

pause savouring sensations) And it's good. So good. So good...

Extract 3: Monologue

Debs: What d'you want me to say? Life's piece and light, everyone lives in harmony? I should love my neighbour like I honour my father and mother? What if I got no father and hate my mother? What then? What d'you suppose we do? *(beat, no one answers)*. I try get on, yeah? I try and put my head down, but shit seems to follow, know what I'm saying? I try and turn my head but it moves man, step in front ah me like, wha gwaan? Long time no see. I'm like, I saw you yesterday, gimme a break man? Just a little break. But it rail up in my face, bare attitude and drama. I try sidestep, but it come in my way.

Extract 4: Duologue

***Braun** produces a gleaming knife, which he brandishes at **Doubt**. **Doubt's** eyes stay on the knife.*

Braun: Killa Bee's woulda skinned im. Garms, kicks, phone... Bring him here, block the exits. Tape his mouth. We'd all have bleedas, course we would, all do innit? We'd circle him, just enough so he thinks he could escape. Whenever he tried we'd sting him... (*demonstrates with knife*). We'd be stingin him for hours I reckon.

***Doubt** cries out, covers her ears, falls to the floor. **Braun** circles her, knife still drawn.*

Braun: Which building was it?

Doubt: I don't, *know!* Maybe it was the one next door, the little one...

Braun: That's not what you said.

Doubt: Yeah, well I don't know do I?

Braun: I asked if you were positive when you were little miss tough girl outside. You said course... You insulted me.

Doubt: No I didn't!

Braun: You bloody well did Doubty.

Extract 5: Duologue

Osman and Isiah look at each other.

Osman: How d'you know?

Isiah: About them? The way they look at each other.

Osman: I watch, all the time. Didn't even notice.

Isiah: Mum says I'm sensitive.

Osman looks at him.

Isiah: Dunno what she means.

Osman: Means you're smart.

Isiah: Oh. Didn't sound like it.

Osman: It does. *(beat)* What happened Si?

Isiah: What d'you mean?

Osman: I don't get it. I was in class, bell went and all I heard was shoutin. Everyone ran, so did I. Didn't even see teachers until I got outside. Then I see.

Isiah: Nuttin to tell. Dem man come centre for Brandon, he musta know they was comin. Start ask everyone to back it... Who would? Nuff man woulda shank im if it weren't for his brothers. Israel was the only man that moved with him innit.

Osman: Yeah. I suppose.

Isiah: They went out, bucked them up. You know what Bee's like, proper loudmouth. Dee come and they started saying stuff about her innit?

Teachers call police. Brandon had nuttin to back it with, but instead of keeping things down he hyped them innit. One ah them boys say something to Dee, Brandon sparked him. That was it. They went for him, shanked my cousin man.

He drops his head again.

Osman: You don't seem surprised.

Isiah: You know Israel right?

Osman: Yeah, but bruv...

Isiah: Live by the sword innit?

Osman: Brandon does. He's OK isn't he? Israel too.

Isiah: Yeah, but Brandon's different innit? Got lucky spirit. He could do powerful good if he put his mind to it.

Extract 6: Group Scene 1

Debs: Wait. Listen.

Brandon: Paramedics. Feds must be on their way. Must be.

Debs: Man knows the difference between Police and Ambulance by their lights. *(louder)* Like it ain his fault.

Brandon spins, angry, looks at her. Walks across the warehouse floor, sits far from her.

Brandon: Better stay put. Feds come they'll draw man. *(laughs)* Know man well, you get me?

Osman: Isn't that a reason to leave?

Brandon: They'll be here soon if the ambulance is. They'll search the estate, start drawing people who fit the general description. That means me. If you're with me, that mean us.

Isiah: Maybe we should go home separate. Leave you.

Brandon: You're involved. You more than anyone. With me or without, Feds'll draw down alla you. Tryina go on like you weren't there.

Debs: Being there don't make you guilty.

Brandon: Part of it. They'll wanna talk to you, especially. Instigator.

Debs: Yeah, right.

Brandon: *Fine* instigator. If it weren't for you-

Osman: Brandon. Come on man.

They all stop, look around. Silence.

Brandon: All right bruv. I'm saying though, if people wanna play blame game,

there's enough for everyone.

Extract 7: Group Scene 2

A loud noise, banging on a metal door. They jump, all scared now.

Osman: Did you shut the door?

Debs: *(tearful)* Yeah, but we're locked in...

Isiah: It's Sweepy. Sweepy's come...

Another bang. They turn to the door.

Brandon: How'd you know that?

Osman: You told us... Didn't you?

Brandon: Nah man, no one mentioned Sweepy. How'd you know it's him?

Isiah: A feelin...

Brandon steps closer to Isiah.

Brandon: Don't lie!

Debs: Brandon, leave him!

Brandon: He's lying, man's got suttin to do with this swear down. Him an his religious shit.

Isiah: Wha you talking bout man...

More banging, going on for a long time. Debs hold onto Brandon who is pointing the Bleeda in all directions.

Debs: I'm scared...

Brandon: Don't be scared babe, it's all right...

Osman: He might get in. We should be ready.

Osman starts to look for a weapon, finds a long piece of wood. **Isiah** has his head down, muttering prayers. The banging has stopped.

Brandon: (screams) Come on! Come on!

Nothing. They all wait, poised. Suddenly, the lights go out. Complete darkness, although we can hear their terrified voices. A bang, and the door opens, light streams in. The youths run, shouting and screaming. Their voices fade. Silence. The lights come back, dim and syrupy. We can hear other voices, the speech of a hundred youths, echoing from the floors and warehouse walls, coming from all the young that entered bare spaces to play, and write graffiti, to take illegal drugs and find each other. All those that met untimely deaths on the streets below, became urban legends amongst their peers. The voices are undecipherable, low murmurs that grow loud when joined together, rising in volume until nothing can be heard above their collective voice, jostling for attention, pleading that we listen one last time.

Then it ends. And there is silence, an empty warehouse space.

EXERCISES FOR PERFORMANCE

Exercise 1: EMOTION BUILD

- Choose a monologue from Extracts 1 - 3 and split into a beginning, middle and end. Think about the different emotions the character might be feeling and choose one to attach to each section.
- Using a scale of 1 – 10, play with the intensity of this emotion, starting with 1 and then building up to 10 and then coming down again. How do you reflect changes of emotional intensity physically? How do you use body language and your face? Does your voice change?
- Try swapping the emotions around and see what effect this has on the overall piece, or try completely opposite emotions to those you initially chose and experiment with the intensity.
- Decide which emotions and levels of intensity work most effectively and 'map out' your choices alongside the text, before rehearsing the monologue and presenting to the group.

Exercise 2: ONLOOKERS

- Choose one of the monologues from Extracts 1 - 3 to work on in small groups. Consider the speech and decide on an alternative setting to the warehouse space.
- One actor should read aloud the monologue, as the rest of the group become 'Onlookers' who enter the space and react to the character speaking. Consider your characters; who are you and why are you there?
- 'Thought Tap' these characters to find out what they are thinking

Exercise 3: BALANCE & STATUS

Explore **physical** indicators of 'status'. How can you show a character to be high in status or low status? Some examples might be:

High Status: Tactile, makes eye contact with audience, has ability to find stillness in a moment, head held high, confident posture

Low Status: Cannot hold anyone's gaze, cannot stand still, head down, slouchy posture, fidgeting hands.

- Choose Extract 4 or 5 from the script. Play with the status of the characters as you read the piece aloud. Start with one character with high status, and one character with low status.
- Try swapping their status around. What impact does this have on the scene? Does it change our impression of the characters?
- Try switching the status within the scene. What happens if the status changes during the exchange? What effect does this have on the scene?
- Try playing the scene silently, using just your body and facial expressions to communicate your status and any changes. Can you effectively convey your status without using any words?

Further Discussion Points:

1. *How balanced is their friendship throughout the piece?*

2. Are there moments where status changes?

Exercise 4: FINDING OBJECTIVES

- In pairs, read aloud Extract 4, with one actor playing each character.
- Consider what each character 'wants' from the scene; what is their objective or intention? Identify any obstacles in their way; are any of the other characters blocking them? What do they do to achieve their objective?
- Perform the piece again with the objectives in mind; try to play your character seeking out their objective. What happens if you also try to make it difficult for the other character to achieve their objective? How can you best build up tension?

EXERCISES FOR EXPLORING ISSUES

Exercise 5: BEFORE & AFTER

- Read Extracts 5 and 6, act out the scenes. What are the themes or issues within the piece?
- We don't see the event which is described. Devise a scene which shows the confrontation between the gangs and use 'thought tapping' to get inside the minds of the characters. What are they thinking during this scene?
- Using forum theatre, change your devised scene by trying out suggestions from the audience of how they can try to make a difference. Act out how their advice and see if it can influence what happens – does it make a difference to what happens afterwards?

Further Discussion Points:

1. *Is Brandon right when he says that everyone is to blame?*
2. *What effect do you think this event will have on the friendships within the group?*

Exercise 6: UNSEEN SCENES

There are lots of characters that we don't meet within the play.

- In small groups devise short scenes which introduce and show us some of these characters we don't see:
 - i) Fear Man
 - ii) Israel
 - iii) Sweepy
- 'Hot seat' the characters to explore who they are and their relationships to the other characters
- Rehearse and perform your scenes thinking about your character's appearance, physical movement, choice of language, use of voice and how you can present them as theatrical devices.

Exercise 7: MOVING TABLEAUX

- Read Extract 7 and imagine the 'ghosts' that occupy the warehouse space. Individually, think of your own 'ghost' character – who are you to the main characters? How did you know them?

- As a whole group, devise three 'still images' or tableaux of the ghosts which **physically** depict:
 - i) Your characters alive in the space. How are you using it? Why are you there?
 - ii) Your character in the moment as they die. What happened to them?
 - iii) Your character as a ghost in the space... how do you feel towards Brandon, Debs, Osman and Isiah?
- Thinking about your character, devise a way to move between your images to connect them in a sequence. Think about how you can use your body to physically express your character's emotional journey.
- Once you have developed your moving image sequence, use thought tapping to attribute each character with a line of dialogue for each stage of their journey; what would you say to the other characters if you could?
- Using your dialogue and building in any sound effects or additional group movement, bring your ghost tableaux to life, moving between the three images as a group.

About Half Moon

“London’s unique theatre for young people” (Time Out)

Half Moon is a local organisation with a national remit. We give young people aged 0 to 18 an opportunity to experience the best in young people’s theatre, both as a participant and as an audience member. We place an emphasis on engaging participants who often feel excluded from arts activity.

Half Moon specialises in new writing and artform development. Our expertise is in supporting artists and young people at every stage of their creative development; providing a gateway to engagement, offering pathways for progression and experimentation.

Half Moon is a regularly funded client of Arts Council England and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

If you would like further information about Half Moon, or further support in using this resource pack then please feel free to contact Donna Bamford, Participatory Projects Manager on 020 7709 8908 or donna@halfmoon.org.uk