

National Theatre Collection

Dara – Learning Pack

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About

This learning pack supports the National Theatre's production of *Dara*, directed by Nadia Fall, which opened on 28th January 2015 at the National's Lyttelton Theatre in London.

Our packs are designed to support viewing the recording on the **National Theatre Collection**. This pack provides links to the UK school curriculum and other productions in the Collection. It also has a plot synopsis with timecodes to allow you to jump to specific sections of the play.

Background Information

Recording Date – 17th March, 2015

Location – Lyttelton Theatre, National Theatre

Age Recommendation – 12+

Cast

Dara	Zubin Varla
Kam / Malik's watchman	
Soldier / Young Aurangzeb	Gurjeet Singh
Faqir / Malik's servant	Scott Karim
Azam / Sipahr / Young Dara	Ronak Patani
Executioner / Malik Jiwan	
Qazi Sayed	Emilio Doorgasingh
Hira Bai	Anjana Vasan
Aurangzeb	Sargon Yelda
Danishmand / Murad	Rudi Dharmalingam
Governor Khan / Murad's aide	
Prison guard	Esh Alladi
Imad / Mian Mir's second disciple	
Mir Khalil	Nicholas Khan
Massage girl / Young Jahanara	Mariam Haque
Akhtar / Hussain / Jamal / Soldier	Gary Wood
Emperor Shah Jahan	Vincent Ebrahim
Jahanara	Nathalie Armin
Roshanara	Anneika Rose
Afia	Anjli Mohindra
Young Roshanara	Liya Tassisa
Imperial slave / Itbar's mother	
Old woman	Indira Joshi
Itbar	Chook Sibtain
Itbar's father / Mullah Farooq	Simon Nagra
Prosecutor Talib	Prasanna Puwanarajah
Mian Mir	Ranjit Krishnamma
Musician	Nawazish Khan
Musician	Kaviraj Singh Dhadyalla
Musician	Vikaash Sankadecha

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Creative Team

Director	Nadia Fall
Author	Shahid Nadeem
Adaptor	Tanya Ronder
Designer	Katrina Lindsay
Music	Niraj Chag
Lighting Designer	Neil Austin
Sound Designer	Carolyn Downing
Vocal Music Director	Japjit Kaur
Movement Director	Liam Steel
Fight Director	Katie Waters
Production Consultant	Anwar Akhtar

Teaching Information

This production is particularly suitable for:

- Students with an interest in the **history of the Mughal empire**.
- Anyone with an interest in the work of **contemporary theatre** director Nadia Fall.

In particular you might like to explore:

- The social, historical and cultural context of the play and its relevance to a contemporary audience.
- How the design of the production helps to bring the Moghul empire to life.

Plot Synopsis With Timecodes

Act I, Scene 1 1659, Malik Jiwan's fort, near the Afghan border: Dara bangs on the gate - he wants to see Malik Jiwan, but the guards won't fetch him. Dara's son, Sipihr, arrives and suggests they continue travelling to reach Persia. Dara tells him that they cannot arrive there looking poor and defeated - Malik can provide them with food and gold.



(0:01:50) Malik Jiwan eventually comes to the gate and recognises Dara. Dara tells Malik they have only 30 people left in their army and that his own brother, Aurangzeb, has driven them towards the Afghan border. Aurangzeb has captured Delhi and Agra Fort - where his father, Shah Jahan, and sister, Jahanara, are. On the way to Persia, Dara's wife died suddenly and her body has had to be taken to Lahore, to be buried beside the tomb of Mian Mir - their Sufi master. Malik welcomes Dara and Sipihr inside.

Act I, Scene 2 1659, 50km from Kandahar (0:05:10): A muezzin sings a call to prayer; Hira Bai (in another place and time) sings a Hindu song. Aurangzeb and Imad pray. Murad arrives with his Aide. He and Aurangzeb discuss drinking alcohol, and their different roles at court

Plot Synopsis With Timecodes

(Aurangzeb) and as a soldier (Murad). Referring to a recent battle, Murad wants to know why Aurangzeb went ahead without him. Aurangzeb responded to advice from an astrologer and reassures his brother that his goal is to see Murad as emperor. He does not want to be emperor himself, but does not want Dara to rule because of his poor religious practices. Aurangzeb wants a strong leader and to spend his time serving Allah. Murad asks Aurangzeb to swear on the Quran that he is trustworthy - he does. Aurangzeb offers Murad the services of a massage girl.

Act I, Scene 3 1659, Malik Jiwan's fort, three nights since Dara and Sipihr arrived (0:10:48): They are preparing to leave and continue their journey. Dara tells Malik about the Battle of Samugarh, where his men thought he had been killed due to Aurangzeb's trickery. As Dara and Sipihr go to leave, Aurangzeb's soldiers arrive. They capture Dara but Sipihr escapes. Malik asks for forgiveness, and explains Aurangzeb bribed him to betray Dara.

Act I, Scene 4 1659, 50km from Kandahar (0:12:17): Murad is sleeping. Aurangzeb kills his Aide and some of Aurangzeb's men shackle Murad and remove his weapons. Aurangzeb tells him he is incarcerating him in Gwalior prison. Murad's men are unable to help him: they are already on Aurangzeb's payroll.

Act I, Scene 5 1659, Agra Fort (0:13:16): Emperor Shah Jahan reacts angrily to a letter from Aurangzeb, in which he is declared 'incompetent to rule'. Jahanara tells her father that Aurangzeb wants the throne even though Dara has been named his successor. She advises Shah Jahan to buy time by sending Aurangzeb a present. They decide to send Shah Jahan's sword, Alamgir, as a gift. Soothed by his daughter, Shah Jahan asks for a girl from his harem.

Act I, Scene 6 1659, the Red Fort, Delhi (0:15:52): Aurangzeb is presented with Alamgir. His sister, Roshanara, reassures Aurangzeb that

Plot Synopsis With Timecodes

he is very close to becoming emperor. Imad arrives and reports that Dara is only a day away. Aurangzeb says before they enter Delhi, Dara must change to riding on a sick elephant. Imad reports that Sipihr is evading capture. They discuss how to gain control of Agra Fort. Aurangzeb does not want to destroy the fort, as it will be his, so Roshanara suggests cutting off the water supply.

Aurangzeb recounts a memory of Hira Bai learning how to wash before prayer.

Act I, Scene 7 1659, Agra Fort (0:18:56): Jahanara and a serving girl, Afia, have realised there is no water in any of the fort's pipes. Afia suggests Jahanara appeal to Aurangzeb.

Act II, Scene 1 1629, the Red Fort, Delhi (0:19:50): Young Jahanara and Young Roshanara are playing. An Imperial Slave rushes past and tells the girls that their mother has not yet given birth. Roshanara wishes her mother would stop having children - they make her weaker and weaker. She warns her sister that if their mother dies, Jahanara will be First Lady of the Empire while she will be forgotten. Roshanara predicts their mother will have another girl and is bored waiting. They discuss marriage and their plans when they're grown up.

(0:22:30) The palace eunuch, Itbar, arrives. He is followed by Young Dara and Young Aurangzeb who are bickering, and Shah Jahan. A Faqir arrives with some apples, and asks the emperor to smell his own hands – the smell of apples will stay on them while he has longer to live. Concerned, Shah Jahan asks which of his sons will destroy his bloodline. The Faqir reluctantly tells him it will be Aurangzeb. Shah Jahan threatens Aurangzeb and thanks the Faqir, who tells Aurangzeb anyone guided by Allah can change their path.

Refusing the offer of payment, the Faqir leaves.

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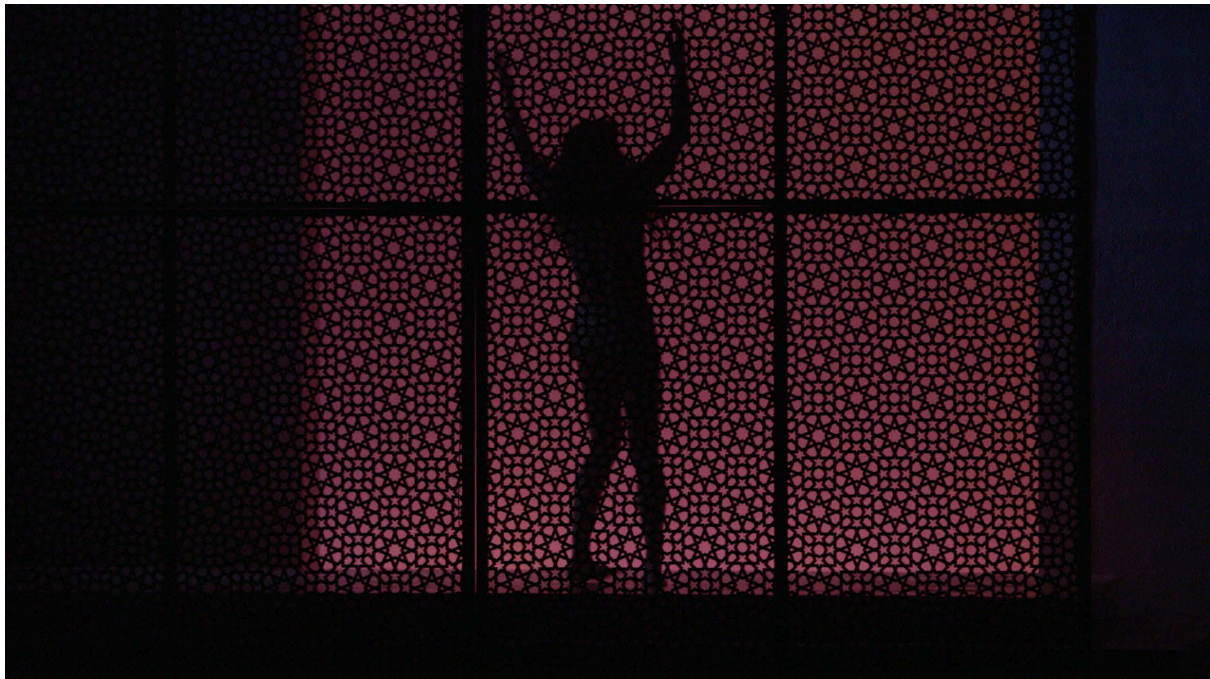
(0:27:43) Dara is fascinated by the Faqir and asks his father more about him. Aurangzeb thinks the Faqir cannot see as much as he says he can. Taking Dara's side, Shah Jahan asks Itbar to remove Aurangzeb to be with the younger brother, Murad. Roshanara follows Aurangzeb.

Act II, Scene 2 1644, the Red Fort, Delhi (0:28:50): Jahanara has been severely burnt when her hijab caught fire. Two slave girls died trying to rescue her. The Faqir has been summoned to assist with Jahanara's recovery. Roshanara comes out to ask for ice, but Itbar doubts her concern is out of sisterly love. Aurangzeb arrives, wanting to see his injured sister. He tries to have the Faqir sent away, but Dara and Shah Jahan intervene. Aurangzeb storms out.

Act II, Scene 3 1659, the harem tower, Agra Fort (0:34:00): Itbar tells the imprisoned Shah Jahan and Jahanara about Dara's entry into Delhi on the sick elephant. The people of the city called for Dara to be set free, but Dara's spirit was crushed. Shah Jahan is miserable at his

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incarceration, and cannot even see the Taj Mahal as he has lost most of his sight. Talking about the monument makes Shah Jahan miss his wife, in whose memory he built it.



Act II, Scene 4 1659, the throne room of the Red Fort, Delhi (0:39:25):

Roshanara tells Aurangzeb that Malik Jiwan has been attacked by a crowd for handing over Dara. Soldiers rescued him but Aurangzeb orders him to be released to the mob. Aurangzeb turns to his political advisors Mir Khalil, Danishmand, Shaista Khan and Mullah Farooq to discuss what should be done with Dara. They worry that they cannot execute Dara without good cause as the public would turn against Aurangzeb. Mullah Farooq suggests they show Dara to be blasphemous to justify killing him.

Act III, Scene 1 1659, Agra Fort (0:43:23): Afia asks Itbar about Dara being put on trial. She is suspicious about the food she is taking to Shah Jahan - Aurangzeb has provided separate meals for him. Although Itbar is a eunuch, Afia flirts with him. Afia asks once more whether she should

Plot Synopsis With Timecodes

be concerned about the food but knowing Jahanara tastes all her father's food first, he recommends trying it on one of the dogs before taking it to him.

Act III, Scene 2 1659, the Red Fort, Delhi (0:45:54): Imad tells Aurangzeb his astrologer has arrived - and so has Jahanara. Jahanara has come to talk them out of putting Dara on trial for apostasy. She asks Aurangzeb to let Dara live as he cannot take the throne from him. To Roshanara's horror, he forgives and pardons Dara. He tells them that while he has absolved him, Dara will still go on trial under Sharia law. The decision over his guilt or innocence is out of Aurangzeb's hands.

Act III, Scene 3 29 August, 1659, a courtroom in Delhi (0:51:01): Qazi Sayed presides over the Sharia court. Dara has chosen to defend himself. Prosecutor Talib calls his first and only witness - Dara. The prosecutor makes his first allegation: Dara translated Sanskrit texts (the Upanishads) into Persian, and referred to these Hindu texts as "God's most perfect revelation". Dara calls them 'one of the blessed books referred to in the Quran'. The prosecutor makes his second allegation, that Dara is a self-proclaimed friend of the Sikhs. Dara acknowledges he is - and finds the religion combines the best of both Hinduism and Islam. Dara is not a Sikh, but acknowledges the value of other religions. Talib is horrified and turns to Dara's own work as evidence, a book called *The Mingling of Two Oceans*. The book looks at the commonalities between Islam and Hinduism - something the prosecutor finds alarmingly similar to Sikhism.

(0:58:17) Sipihr is brought into the courtroom in chains. Prosecutor Talib again asks Dara whether Islam is the supreme religion. Dara does not think it matters which religion gives you enlightenment, he believes it lies deeper - in a desire of each religion to understand their god better and to live better lives. Humanness is shared between all

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religions and Dara believes it is the duty of Muslims to allow other faiths to prosper.

Talib accuses Dara of reducing Muhammad to mortal status. He argues Dara's poetry undermines Allah, reading out the line 'Paradise is where there is no Mullah'. Dara stands by his words. He hopes in paradise others do not tell you how to live. Dara prays five times a day and obeys Ramadan, but believes it is what lies behind these actions, rather than the actions themselves, which is important. Roshanara has been watching the proceedings in hiding with Aurangzeb and cries out 'Blasphemy'. Dara calls the prosecutor narrow-minded for his use of religious ideas - they are not entrenched and can change over time. Talib again asks Dara if he believes the Quran is God's word. Dara does not - he thinks it is 'the ultimate gift from God' but should not be used against people. Dara describes Muhammad as Allah's greatest messenger, but not the only one, citing Christian prophets. Talib asks Dara to remove his ring - it contains the word God, written in both Arabic and Sanskrit. Dara also wears a Christian cross around his neck.



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(1:13:04) The prosecutor finishes by reading from Dara’s poetry: “What shall I do? I know not what I am, I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor heathen, nor a Muslim.” Sipahr offers to defend his father, but it is too late to change counsel. Dara begins his defence, calling the trial meaningless – it is just an argument between he and his brother. He addresses Aurangzeb as he talks about how wearing the hijab became tradition rather than a religious doctrine. Dara asks his brother to show mercy to his sons. Aurangzeb calls for proceedings to be brought to an end. Qazi Sayed declares Dara guilty of apostasy and sentences him to death. Turning to Aurangzeb, Dara says ‘But you can save me, brother’.

Interval

Act IV, Scene 1 1639, Mian Mir’s dargah, Lahore (1:21:52): Qawwli music plays. Dara comes to see Mian Mir, the Sufi saint. He is travelling south to quell a rebellion and asks for his blessing. Mian Mir upbraids at him wanting blessing to kill people. The prince leaves but quickly returns to apologise to the saint. Mian Mir tells the group a parable about an emperor who is lost in the desert and trades his whole empire for a glass of water. Dara is moved by the tale and is sent away with Mian Mir’s blessing.

Act IV, Scene 2 The past, around 1648 (1:31:39): Hira Bai and Aurangzeb playfully flirt and kiss. Hira Bai asks Aurangzeb to taste some wine to prove his love. He is teetotal, but goes to drink some until Hira Bai stops him. They change the subject to discussing the future empire. Most of it is Hindu but Aurangzeb thinks they will all convert to Islam. He asks Hira Bai if she will convert - she says it would make her sad and asks him to convert to Hinduism instead.

Act IV, Scene 3 The past, Dara is in his 20s (1:36:22): Shah Jahan tells Dara he was born to be a prince, but the young man is troubled. He cannot bear being so privileged and would prefer a spiritual life as a faqir. Shah Jahan says it is Dara’s destiny to unify Hindustan.

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Act IV, Scene 4 The past, 1654 (1:39:10): Hira Bai has consumption. Aurangzeb talks her through wudu, the Muslim practice of cleaning before prayer. Mid-way through, Hira collapses and dies. Aurangzeb is devastated.

Act IV, Scene 5 1659, a prison in Delhi (1:41:50): Sipihr is annoyed Dara didn't defend himself properly in court, but Dara's only concern is that Sipihr isn't praying. They recite the full poem of which the prosecutor had only read part in court.

Act IV, Scene 6 1659, the Red Fort, Delhi (1:45:37): It is the day after Dara's trial and Roshanara is holding a party. Aurangzeb comes in and breaks up the revelry. He angrily sends Roshanara away and asks Itbar for advice on whether to release Dara. Itbar reads Aurangzeb a letter from Shah Jahan appealing for Dara's life.

(1:49:25) Imad comes in with two visitors for Itbar - his parents. The last time he saw them, he was eleven and about to be sold into slavery and made a eunuch. Itbar asks Imad to take his parents to be whipped. He says if he sees them again, he will have them killed.

Act IV, Scene 7 1659, a prison in Delhi (1:52:35): Itbar arrives at Dara's prison cell with an executioner. Sipihr goes to defend his father but is held back by Itbar. The eunuch tells the executioner Aurangzeb does not want to know where the body is buried.

Act IV, Scene 8 1659, the harem tower, Agra Fort (1:53:48): Itbar arrives with a box from Aurangzeb. Shah Jahan is convinced his letter to his son has worked and that the box contains a watermelon. He reaches in and his hands are covered in blood. Jahanara cries out when she sees what is inside.

(1:56:08) Afia has heard the noise and runs into Itbar as she goes to

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help Jahanara and Shah Jahan. She tells him not to go anywhere and dashes off to help Jahanara. Itbar commits suicide.

Act V, Scene 1 1659, a week after Dara's death (1:57:12): Aurangzeb sees the Faqir sitting on the steps of the mosque. The Faqir accuses Aurangzeb of having Murad poisoned, of corrupting Itbar so much he committed suicide, of plotting to kill Sipihr and of having Dara murdered. Aurangzeb calls for the Faqir to be tried for apostasy. As the Faqir is led off, Aurangzeb issues a decree to cut off the hands and feet of liquor-sellers and ban the planting of roses and the use of silk. He wants to force all non-Muslims to convert to Islam.

Act V, Scene 2 1707, the throne room (2:01:30): Aurangzeb is 89 and dying.



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Two of his sons, Kam and Azam, are with him. Aurangzeb tells them he wants them to go to separate parts of the empire, to avoid fighting over who will rule when he dies. Azam grudgingly leaves for Bijapur. Aurangzeb confides in Kam that he does not think he has been a good ruler. He asks Kam to use his own money to bury him - and to distribute what is left to the faqirs. Aurangzeb is concerned his seventeen sons may start a war of accession after his death. He orders Kam, his favourite, to leave.

The ghost of Hira Bai sings. Aurangzeb wants her to ask Dara to intercede with Allah for him.

The End

Find out more

Read

The **Rehearsal Insights Pack**, featuring the rehearsal diary from this production, written by Staff Director Ola Ince

Explore

More materials relating to the production including the costume bible, costume designs, prompt scripts, programme, stage management reports and more are held at the National Theatre Archive, which is free to visit. Find out more here:

<https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/archive>