

National Theatre Collection

Small Island – Learning Guide

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About

This learning guide supports the National Theatre's production of *Small Island*, directed by Rufus Norris, which opened on 17th April 2019 at the National's Olivier 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.

Here you'll also find all the information you need to enable you to study the production and write about it in detail. This includes notes about all of the key elements from performance style to design. You'll also find pointers for further research.

Background Information

Recording Date – 30th May, 2019

Location – Olivier Theatre, National Theatre

Age Recommendation – 14+ (strong language and racist terms)

Cast

Mrs Ryder	Amy Forrest
Hortense	Leah Harvey
Miss Jewel	Sandra James-Young
Little Hortense	Keira Chansa
Mr Philip / GI / Kenneth	Trevor Laird
Miss Ma	Jacqueline Boatswain
Little Michael	Shaquahn Crowe
Michael	CJ Beckford
Policeman / GI	Natey Jones
Woman in Hurricane	Chereen Buckley
Bernard	Andrew Rothney
Queenie	Aisling Loftus
Aunt Doroth / Woman with Baby	Beatie Edney
Mrs Buxton / Miss Todd /	
Woman in Cinema	Stephanie Jacob
Mr Buxton / Ginger /	
Sergeant Thwaites / Railway Worker	Adam Ewan
Young Man in Sweet Shop / Kip /	
GI / Railway Worker	Cavan Clarke
Arthur	David Fielder
Franny	Phoebe Frances Brown
Franny	Rebecca Lee
Gilbert	Eustache Jnr
Recruiting Officer One / Soames /	
Railway Worker / Military Policeman	Paul Bentall
Elwood	Johann Myers
Recruiting Office Two / GI / Foreman	John Hastings
Usherette	CJ Johnson
GI	Daniel Norford
Celia	Shiloh Coke

Background Information

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Location – Olivier Theatre, National Theatre

Age Recommendation – 14+ (strong language and racist terms)

Creative Team

Director	Rufus Norris
Adaptor	Helen Edmundson
Writer	Andrea Levy
Set and Costume Designer	Katrina Lindsay
Projection Designer	Jon Driscoll
Lighting Designer	Paul Anderson
Composer and Music Director	Benjamin Kwasi Burrell
Sound Designer	Ian Dickinson
Movement Director	Coral Messam
Fight Director	Kate Waters
Music Consultant	Gary Crosby

Contextual Information

You might like to explore some of the following to aide your understanding of the context of the production:

- Find out more about the history of the Windrush generation and the Windrush scandal:

British Library: The Windrush Generation Scandal

Black Cultural Archives: War to Windrush

- Watch the **original Pathé newsreel** of the arrival of the Empire Windrush.

Teaching Information

This production is particularly suitable for:

- **English Literature** students studying the original novel at GCSE or A Level.
- **History** or **Politics** students studying the Windrush scandal.
- **Drama and theatre** students studying the play for A Level.
- **Production arts** students with an interest in design.
- Further cross-curricular working at Key Stage 3 and above.

In particular you might like to explore:

- The similarities and differences between Andrea Levy's original novel and Helen Edmundson's stage adaptation.
- The questions the play raises about race and identity (both personal and national).
- How music and movement are used to create and enhance different scenes and locations in the production.
- The central performances by Leah Harvey (Hortense) and Aisling Loftus (Queenie).
- The production design and how the specific worlds of Jamaica and Britain in the 1940s are created on stage.

Production Notes

The following notes have been compiled to help guide you through the significant design and performance aspects as you watch the production, or to remind you of them after you have watched it. You may also want to make your own notes and form your own opinions on the effectiveness of these aspects as you explore the production.

Key Design Elements: Set

- This production utilises the drum revolve of the Olivier Theatre's stage. The set design is non-naturalistic. The cyclorama is used for the numerous video (still and moving image) projections that are key to creating setting, period, mood and atmosphere.
- Hortense and Gilbert's bedsit is the most detailed creation of space including bed, sink, dining table, cupboard and freestanding door. Queenie's sweetshop combines projection (rows of sweet jars, for example) with a counter, cash register, chair and freestanding door.



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- There is a marked difference between the locations of Great Britain and Jamaica. In Britain the colour palette of furniture, projection and also clothing (see below) is muted. Film is often in black and white (both for historical accuracy and a sense of difference to the warmer climate of Jamaica). In contrast, Jamaica is depicted in much brighter, warmer tones of yellow, orange and sepia.



- The schoolroom in Jamaica includes chairs and a table which also represent the chicken shed (using a different image on the blackboard to represent the roof of the shed) and the large table doubles as a tree in which Michael and Hortense look for cuckoo eggs.
- Other one-off locations (the scene with the pig at Queenie's farm, for example) are created with basic set such as metal pails and a frame with a pig carcass suspended from it.
- Transitions include flying in window frames, door frames emerging from trap doors (the first transition from Jamaica to Britain for example), and use of the revolve (Hortense and Gilbert's bedsit vs. Queenie's rooms, for example).
- Because of the varied locations, quick transitions and the contrasts between Jamaica and Great Britain, the stage is generally left bare, with trucks used for

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locations such as the sweet shop, and use of flying in to provide window frames. Doors sometimes appear from trap doors. The sense of busy streets is created by the use of ensemble moving across the stage, enhance by projection, rather than requiring naturalistic detail and large/static items of set. The revolve also aids rapid transitions between scenes and locations.

Key Design Elements: Costume

- Like the set, the two settings of Jamaica and Great Britain are markedly different in their use of colour, shape and fit. All costumes are historically accurate for the period of World War II and the post war period (1940s and 50s). Pencil skirts, low heeled shoes, handbags, gloves and hats are important pieces of costume to pay attention to.
- The heat of Jamaica is suggested by use of linen (for example Elwood's shirt and trousers) and short sleeved shirts/dresses. Some men wear singlets. Female characters wear brightly coloured dresses in tropical colours such as red and yellow. Dresses often use ruffles, women wear white cotton or lace gloves and carry small handbags over one wrist. In external scenes, women also wear hats.



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- The suggestion that Britain is colder and that it is war time is suggested by the use of the grey and brown palette for costumes. Housecoats for women in muted blues and browns, black trilby or bowler hats for men, worn with a traditional belted mac to suggest external locations. The suggestion of racial division is highlighted by this use of costume. Hortense's clothing in British scenes tends to have straighter, more restrictive lines (such as her suit in which she arrives) than those we see in the Jamaican scenes.
- The class of some of the ensemble characters in Britain is also suggested through wearing brown coats and flat caps, vs. others who wear bowler hats to suggest they are business workers.
- RAF uniforms are historically accurate and include side cap or officer cap depending on rank.
- Queenie's Aunt Dorothy is stereotypical in her dress – a fur jacket, three-strings of pearls, dusky pink dress, holding a china teacup and saucer in her first scene.
- It was common for women to wear housecoats when in their own home. For Queenie, this also helps to conceal her pregnancy from other characters and the audience, until her movement and gesture suggests otherwise (for example rubbing her stomach as she sits down at the end of a scene). When Queenie goes into labour and removes her housecoat, we see that she has been wearing a corset in order to try and conceal the baby bump.

Key Design Elements: Lighting

- Due to the constant use of projection, lighting in this production has to be carefully and sensitively applied.
- Scenes set in Britain are lit down stage with a cold wash, allowing for the (often black and white) projections which dominate the cyclorama. Scenes which take place in Jamaica are lit with a warmer tone to suggest the heat and tropical climate. Projections set in Jamaica are often in colour. The intensity of the Jamaican scenes is brighter than the British scenes.
- It is important to draw attention to the way in which the darker walls in the British scenes seem to leech the colour away from the lights, as opposed to the warmth of those scenes set in Jamaica.

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Key Design Elements: Sound

- Recorded sound effects to suggest location include a ticking clock (the family dining room), the bell on a bus and crashing waves. The sound of rain when the Jamaican RAF recruits are lined up and shivering also suggests weather conditions and discomfort.
- Song – *Abide With Me* when Aunt Dorothy dies. This popular hymn has funereal connotations.
- War time sounds include air raid sirens and the engines of RAF bombers.
- Recorded music, such as jazz music, to suggest setting (such as a city), recorded by the Jazz Jamaica Allstars.

Key Design Elements: Wigs, Hair and Make-up

- Period hair and make-up – hair for British woman is often in waves, (curled and ‘set’). Silk headscarves suggest being inside the house, more formal hats for external locations. Gives important period detail. Queenie often wears a headscarf to suggest her domestic duties, particularly after she is married and becomes a housewife.
- Young Hortense has plaited hair with pink ribbons, whilst the adult Hortense’s hair is pinned in a low bun.
- Jamaican women wear colourful head scarves or head wraps, co-ordinated with the rest of their costume. Miss Ma has grey streaks in her hair to suggest age, and it is waved and pinned.
- Men all have their hair cut short, true to the period. Bernard’s hair is parted at the side and slicked down not only reflecting the style of the period, but making him seem very strait-laced and sensible. This creates an important contrast to Queenie who, in the early stages of her relationship with Bernard, is often seen in pink or brighter colours than Bernard. (This is important later when their opposing attitudes to race become more evident).

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Performance Style

- This adaptation uses multi-rolling and the external scenes in particular offer interesting insights into how ensemble members move and use performance space to create a sense of location as well as character.
- Ensemble members often assist with transitions, either by moving items of set or by creating characters walking in a particular location to make changes in location obvious to the audience.
- Although the set is non-naturalistic, the acting style is naturalistic, including the use of sustained and accurate Jamaican accents. Actors interact with set as if it is fully present (e.g. acting as if walls surround the freestanding walls of Queenie's flat).
- Both Queenie and Hortense address the audience directly – this can be an important discussion point compared to the narrative voices in the original novel. These two women deliver their monologues to the audience from a downstage position.

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- Mannerisms and gestures are subtle, but important, ways in which to communicate nuances of character. For example, upon Hortense's arrival in England, she tries to hide her ignorance of certain issues by sneaking a look at something Gilbert is doing but pretending she hasn't.

Key Moments

You might like to consider these key moments in particular when you are studying the production.

- The opening scene where Hortense narrates her origins directly to the audience, and is joined by a younger Hortense. The way in which the audience is immediately engaged in the story is important in terms of both narrative and the social, cultural and historical context of the Windrush story.
- The air raid and explosion (46 – 47 mins) demonstrates the combination of projection (moving image), minimal set downstage (freestanding door frame and arm chair), ensemble movement and the use of clothes descending from the fly tower to create the sense of mass destruction.



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- The incident in the cinema between Queenie, Gilbert and the American G.I.s. Look in particular at how pathos is created when Arthur is shot. This is the first time that he speaks in the play, having been mute before due to shellshock. There is an audible response from the audience. (1:08:00 – 1:10:15)
- The developing relationship between Hortense and Gilbert, as well as the creation of comedy (2:01:00 – 2:07:48) which is developed in final scene (2:42:54 - end). This is an excellent scene for character interaction and developing relationships.
- Bernard's return from the war is important in demonstrating the pernicious nature of racism and prejudice, and the division between Bernard and Queenie. (2:08:00 – 2:13:40)

Plot Synopsis

Act One

Summer, 1939, Jamaica

Hortense prepares her classroom for the arrival of a hurricane, while Mrs Ryder, a married schoolteacher, marvels at the wind. Mrs Ryder insists they keep the door to the schoolhouse unlocked in case someone wants to join them. Hortense explains that she too is waiting for the man she loves to come to rescue her and tells their story.

(0:05:00) We see Hortense as a child. Her mother and father have gone away for work, leaving their daughter in the care of her grandmother, Miss Jewel. Miss Jewel escorts Hortense to the home of Mr Philip Roberts, Hortense's father's cousin, where she is to receive an education and live with his wife, Miss Ma, and son, Michael. Mr Philip runs a strict and god-fearing household. Hortense and the mischievous Michael strike up a friendship – the two frequently embark on adventures and play tricks on one another. When Hortense gets in trouble with Mr Philip, Michael apologises and she forgives him, but promises to get him back for it.



(0:13:24) Some years later, Michael is sent away to boarding school. We come to the present day – Michael returns home for good and is a confident, attractive young man. Everyone is dazzled by Michael, until he questions his father at the dinner table on the subject of Darwinism. Mr Philip orders Michael to leave and

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when Hortense nervously giggles, Miss Ma strikes her across the face. Everyone leaves the room and Michael apologises to Hortense about her face. Hortense is overcome by her feelings for Michael, and begins to babble to him about her job and Mrs Ryder, the schoolteacher, who has blonde hair and pale skin. Michael shows an interest in Mrs Ryder, and asks if she is married. He then flirts with Hortense as they relive their childhood adventures.

(0:19:35) Hortense tells the audience that Michael has barely left her side since then, he even came to look for her in the schoolhouse once. Hortense is certain that tonight, on the night of the hurricane, he will come for her.



(0:21:05) The hurricane hits, and Mrs Ryder is distressed. Michael suddenly appears at the door, shoving Hortense out of the way and rushing to passionately kiss Mrs Ryder. Hortense is horrified and runs from the schoolhouse into the storm. The news travels fast of Michael and Mrs Ryder's affair, and Hortense returns home to find Miss Ma distraught and Mr Philip enraged. Michael enters to inform them that he is going to England, to 'fight for the Mother Country' in the war. Mr Philip urges him to go, as he has brought shame upon their family.

(0:25:00) Michael advises Hortense to get away from their small town. He tells her there is a whole world to experience, but Hortense counters that he left and lost

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his morality. Michael leaves, apologising before he goes, but this time Hortense cannot forgive him.

Winter, 1941, London (0:27:23)

Two volunteers are attempting to remove furniture from the living room of a flat, while Bernard protests. Queenie tries to persuade him that other people need the furniture because they've been bombed out, but Bernard demands 'Are they our sort of people?'. Queenie reflects to the audience how she ended up here – and begins to tell the story of her deliverance from her family's farm.

(0:29:15) In Lincolnshire, Queenie's glamorous aunt, Dorothy, explains to Queenie's parents that she needs some help in her sweet shop and wants Queenie to come to live with her in London. Queenie's parents resist the idea as they need her help on their farm, but eventually give in. Queenie goes to London with her aunt, where they shop for new clothes. Dorothy remarks that Queenie will soon be snapped up by a nice young gentleman. Queenie confides in the audience that she'd seen romance at the movies and wondered if she could be adored and pursued.



(0:35:16) Queenie admits that the first time Bernard came into the shop, she hardly noticed him. Bernard eventually summons up the courage to ask Queenie to go for a walk with him, but he is extremely reserved. Bernard continues to call for her, and Queenie complains to Dorothy that he only ever remarks on the weather – it isn't

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the romantic liaison she had hoped for, but Dorothy assures her he's a gentleman. Queenie attempts to break things off with Bernard, but he begs her not to, saying he was hoping they would get engaged. When Dorothy suddenly dies, Queenie agrees to marry Bernard rather than return to her parents' farm.

(0:42:39) Queenie moves in to Bernard's house and meets Arthur, Bernard's father, who fought in the First World War and now suffers from shell-shock. Bernard then tells Queenie that he wants children. Queenie describes how perfunctory her 'conjugal relations' are with her husband. She has not yet fallen pregnant and even went to the doctor, who advised that she 'try harder'.

(0:45:29) We return to 1941 and Bernard and Queenie are still fighting about the furniture. Queenie insists on asking Arthur if she can give donate the furniture, and Arthur nods decisively. Bernard complains about Queenie working in the Rest Centre day and night. Suddenly the air raid sirens sound, and the three of them dive for shelter. Queenie is thrown backwards by the force of the blast, but is sure they haven't been hit – when she says she'll go and have a look, Bernard suddenly stops her, telling Queenie he loves her for the first time, and she is taken aback by his show of sentimentality.



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(0:47:45) At the Rest Centre, someone asks Queenie if she can take in three members of a flight crew for a few nights, but Queenie says Bernard would never allow it. Bernard appears, and tells Queenie that he has signed up to the RAF. Queenie helps him with his uniform, and she and Arthur wave him off. A week later, the three airmen arrive to stay at Queenie's house – one of them is Michael Roberts. There is an instant attraction between Queenie and Michael.

Autumn, 1943, Lincolnshire (0:52:20)

Gilbert Joseph, a Jamaican RAF recruit, is brawling with a GI. Gilbert addresses the audience, telling them that it feels good to fight with the soldier. He says he will take the audience back to the moment he signed up in Kingston, Jamaica, so they can understand why.

(0:53:34) An Officer addresses Gilbert, and Gilbert explains that he intends to become a lawyer. The officer tells him that with his grades, he'll be an air gunner or flight engineer. Gilbert is delighted, but his cousin, Elwood, criticises him for joining 'a white man's war'. Gilbert assures him that he is going to get off the island, become an air gunner and then go to an English university. But when Gilbert arrived in Lincolnshire after his basic training, instead of being an air gunner, he had to drive a coal truck for six months. He also wasn't warmly welcomed by the locals.

(0:59:53) Gilbert is in town alone one day when Arthur approaches him. Gilbert is confused by Arthur's attention, but when a plane flies overhead and Arthur suffers a panic attack, his confusion turns to concern. Arthur takes a piece of paper from his pocket with his address on it, and Gilbert returns him home. Queenie rushes from the farmhouse, calling Michael's name but stops when she realises Gilbert isn't Michael. Queenie explains that Arthur thought Gilbert was someone else – Gilbert is flirtatious and they get on well. Queenie invites him in, but Gilbert has to rush to the barracks, so she gives him a pie to take with him.



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(1:05:40) Back in the present, a white American GI starts to bait Gilbert, calling him ‘boy’. Just as the group are about to come to blows, Queenie rushes in, asking Gilbert if he’s seen Arthur. Arthur appears, and Queenie invites Gilbert to the pictures with them.

(1:07:11) When they enter the cinema, the Usherette tells Gilbert that he has to sit at the back, with the other ‘coloureds’. Gilbert stands his ground, but when one of the GIs uses a racial slur, the tension intensifies. A fight breaks out, and policemen begin hitting the black GIs with batons and blowing whistles, which terrify Arthur – a shot is fired, and Arthur slumps to the ground. Queenie rushes to him, and he says her name faintly, before dying in her arms.

Winter, 1946, Kingston, Jamaica (1:10:39)

The war is over and there is a festival atmosphere in Kingston. Hortense enters - she approaches Gilbert, thinking he is Michael, and he accidentally knocks her over. She scolds him coldly, and he calls her a ‘spitfire’. Hortense asks if he knows Michael as they received a telegram to say that he is missing, and Gilbert gently tells her that that means the person has passed away. ‘Michael is not the sort of person to “pass away,”’ Hortense retorts.

Summer, 1947, London (1:14:25)

Queenie is speaking to an officer, Captain Soames, about her husband. Bernard was demobbed in the winter of 1946, but still hasn’t come home. The Captain tells her that her husband served a short time in military prison towards the end of his time in India, for disobeying orders and losing his weapon. Queenie despairs – she needs to look after the house in Earl’s Court and doesn’t even know whether she’s a widow or not.

Spring, 1948, Kingston, Jamaica/London, England (1:16:39)

Hortense and her friend Celia are walking - there is a political rally happening nearby. Celia is excited that Hortense is going to meet her ‘RAF man’ at last, she is sure that he will ask her to go to England with him. Celia’s boyfriend is Gilbert - he and Hortense recognise each other. Elwood appears, and criticises Gilbert for not attending the rally. Gilbert believes there are better opportunities in England. Elwood believes strongly in Jamaica gaining independence and goes to the rally. Gilbert and Celia talk excitedly about their future life in England. Spitefully, Hortense says that Celia cannot go to England because her mother is mad. Celia slaps Hortense in the face and runs off.

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(1:23:54) Michael arrives at the house in Earl's Court and calls out for Queenie. She is dishevelled and shocked to see him. There is an electricity between them – Michael asks if he can stay the night, as he departs for Canada the next day. Queenie admits that she has been worried about him. Michael says he had lost his good luck charm, his wallet – Queenie takes it out of her pocket, where she had kept it for him. She asks if the photo of the little girl inside was of his sister, and Michael claims that he lost his family in a hurricane.

(1:28:07) Hortense approaches Gilbert, who has just heard news of the Empire Windrush sailing. Hortense says she will lend Gilbert the money for the passage to England, if he promises to marry her and send for her once he has a place to live. Gilbert is stunned at her proposition, but Hortense explains that a single woman cannot travel on her own.

(1:29:34) Queenie talks about how Michael makes her feel desirable, electric and alive – very different to how she felt with Bernard.

(1:30:29) Gilbert doesn't even think Hortense likes him that much, but the promise of England is very tempting. Hortense believes England is her 'golden life'; she dreams of being a teacher and treated with respect. Gilbert admits that Hortense has guessed his price, and 'it is the price of a ticket to England.' They marry and

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Hortense makes Gilbert promise to come back for her. He boards the Empire Windrush and waves goodbye.

Interval

Act Two (1:36:17)

London

Gilbert is on a bed in a small room and is woken by the sound of the doorbell. He panics as he rushes to welcome Hortense, who surveys the room with distaste. She asks to see the other rooms but Gilbert explains that this one room is it. Queenie enters the room and tries to make conversation with Hortense. Kenneth, another lodger, and Gilbert enter struggling under the weight of Hortense's trunk. Kenneth asks if Hortense has any guava or rum. Gilbert tells Kenneth to leave, and Hortense is horrified that he has such a rude friend but Gilbert explains that anyone from the West Indies is a friend.



(1:43:53) Hortense scolds Gilbert for not coming to meet her at the dock. She also notes that there is only one bed – and tells Gilbert to sleep on the chair. Gilbert explains that he has a chamber pot for her to use and unfortunately, as he brandishes it excitedly, some of the contents slop over the side – he has forgotten to empty it and rushes to pour the contents down the sink. Hortense is disgusted, but Gilbert explains how many houses turned him away on account of the colour of

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his skin, and tells her she is lucky.

(1:50:50) Queenie is in the living room, and Miss Todd enters to complain about Queenie's lodgers. She explains that her neighbours feel like strangers in their own country. Queenie stands her ground, and when Hortense arrives at the door, invites her in and asks Miss Todd to tell Hortense exactly what she thinks of her to her face. Miss Todd leaves, and Queenie offers to go shopping with Hortense, saying she does not mind being seen with her. Hortense is puzzled, but agrees. Once Hortense leaves, Queenie caresses her stomach under her dress and breathes with pain. She is now heavily pregnant.

(1:57:46) Gilbert is at work with his Post Office van. He asks some Railway Workers for help, and they begin taunting and abusing him, asking him when he's going 'back to the jungle'. Gilbert wants to fight the men, but when the Foreman returns to address the commotion, Gilbert capitulates and apologises. Elwood appears in Gilbert's mind's eye, asking him why he's fallen for the white man's lies again.



(2:01:17) Hortense is cleaning, but when Gilbert returns home he shouts at her to stand up, 'No wife of mine will be on her knees in this country!' Hortense is alarmed, and scolds him for being rude. She slams his dinner down in front of him, it is a hard-boiled egg and some sliced potato, which she thinks is the English 'chips'.

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Gilbert sweeps the plate onto the floor in anger and storms out. Hortense covers her face in despair, and Miss Jewel appears in her mind's eye, asking her to recite a poem she learned at school, which inspires her to remain strong.

(2:05:16) Gilbert returns with a present for Hortense: real fish and chips. Hortense asks Gilbert what a 'darkie' is, and says that she was shouted at in the street. She refuses to stay in the area for long, vowing to move once she has a job as a teacher.

(2:08:11) Bernard is in the living room; Queenie is stunned to see him. Bernard asks where Arthur is, and Queenie explains that he died in 1944. Bernard admits he's been back in England for four months. Queenie is in disbelief. Gilbert comes to see if Queenie is alright – Bernard is astonished, and slams the door in Gilbert's face. He tells her she has to evict the 'coolies' immediately, and Queenie explains that she couldn't have held onto the house without them. Queenie is furious that Bernard thought Arthur was alive and still didn't come back to them, and says he can sleep in a separate bed.

(2:13:45) Gilbert is waiting in the street near the council offices. Hortense emerges, distressed, as she has been told she can't teach and has to train all over again. Gilbert comforts her and tells her he can get her a sewing job, but Hortense says that her job is to teach, not sew – Gilbert says he works as a postman, but one day he will study the law. An understanding has developed between them, and Hortense seems almost about to smile at Gilbert's jokes.



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(2:18:48) Bernard is waiting for Gilbert and Hortense in their room. He tells them he is selling the house and they must leave, saying he fought in a war to live respectably again without them. Gilbert says he fought in the same war, and now he is looking for a decent life. The two start scuffling, and Queenie appears to break them up. Queenie lets out a cry of agony, and demands that everyone leave the room except for Hortense. Queenie tells Hortense to block the door, boil water and look between her legs. The baby comes suddenly, and Hortense holds him in disbelief: the baby is black. Hortense now thinks Gilbert might be the father, so lets in the two men who are clamouring at the door. Queenie assures them that the baby is not Gilbert's. Bernard rushes from the room.

(2:25:44) Queenie sees Michael in her mind's eye, telling her a story about seeing a hummingbird on a London street.

(2:28:22) Queenie sleeps, and the baby starts crying – Bernard comes in and nurses him. Queenie apologises – with Bernard gone she was so lonely. Bernard admits he should have been a better husband to her. Queenie asks what happened, and he explains that he was sent in to break up the riots in Calcutta, but it was a bloodbath: his only friend in the army was brutally set on fire, and he was put in prison. He had malaria and did some 'dreadful' and 'repulsive' things. He didn't want to come home because he felt he didn't deserve Queenie, and he didn't want end up like Arthur.

(2:33:13) Queenie is in the living room with the baby and calls to Gilbert and Hortense – they are moving out at the end of the week. Queenie invites them to have tea with her but they are on edge, and Gilbert asks where Bernard is. Queenie says the baby's name is Michael and hands him to Hortense. Queenie desperately asks them to take the baby. Bernard appears, insisting she will not give him away, but Queenie insists that Bernard could never be proud of him. Queenie sobs and Gilbert goes to help her, but Bernard snaps at him 'Get your filthy black hands off my wife!' Gilbert gives an impassioned speech, saying he refuses to be the servant forever simply because he is black. Bernard coldly retorts he can't understand what Gilbert says. Gilbert and Hortense leave.

(2:41:17) Once alone in their room, Gilbert and Hortense discuss what has happened. Hortense says that she was given away by her mother, but that she was very loved. Gilbert doesn't want to leave that baby alone with people like Mr Bligh. Hortense said she was proud of the way Gilbert spoke to Mr Bligh, and that he will be an excellent lawyer. She kisses him, and invites him to sleep in her bed.

Plot Synopsis



15 November, 1948 (2:46:15)

‘There are some words that once spoken split the world in two’ – Queenie hands her baby to Hortense and Gilbert. They promise they will be proud of the child and he will be loved.

The End

Find out more

Read

Staff Director Anna Himali Howard's **Rehearsal Insights** to learn how Rufus Norris and the company brought the production to the stage.

Watch

This discussion chaired by National Theatre Associate Ola Animashawun, exploring the race and the historic relationship between Africa, America, the Caribbean and Britain.

This short film exploring how the music featured in the production was created and its importance in helping to tell the story onstage.

Suggestions for Further Activity

Read a synopsis of Andrea Levy's original novel or read the novel itself. Compare the structure and narrative voice (e.g. first person) in the novel to the way in which the story is told in the play. Why do you think Andrea Levy and Helen Edmundson have chosen to tell the story in these particular ways?

Read this article by Andrea Levy

Listen to this radio programme featuring director Rufus Norris and the cast of *Small Island*, talking about the challenges of bringing *Small Island* to the stage.

Find out more

Andrea Levy recorded an interview shortly before her death, on the condition that it not be broadcast until after she had died.

[Listen to it here.](#)

As well as being the Artistic Director of the National Theatre, Rufus Norris has directed a wide range of productions. Watch and research more about productions such as *The Threepenny Opera*, *London Road* or *Macbeth* at the **[NT Archive](#)**.

Suggestions for Further Research

The Windrush Generation, as they have become known, were the focus of news headlines again in 2018. **[Read this article by David Lammy MP.](#)**

We hope that you have enjoyed watching and studying ***Small Island***. Don't forget that there are many more fantastic productions to explore as part of the NT Collection. We hope that watching this recorded production has made you feel inspired to see and make live theatre. **[Why not find out what's happening at your local theatre and how you can get involved?](#)**

This guide to support your viewing of the production was compiled by Teacher and Arts Education Consultant Susie Ferguson.

If you have any comments or feedback on our resources please contact us:
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