

National Theatre Collection



Nye

Learning Guide

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About This Guide

This learning guide supports the National Theatre's production of **Nye**, directed by **Rufus Norris**, which opened on **24 February 2024** at the **National Theatre**.

Our packs are designed to support viewing the recording on the **National Theatre Collection**. This pack provides a plot synopsis with timestamps to allow you to jump to specific sections of the play, and detailed content warnings to assess suitability for your classroom.

Here you'll find all the information you need to enable you to study the production and write about it in detail. You'll also find pointers for further research.

Background Information

Recording Date – 23 April 2024

Location – Olivier Theatre, National

Theatre Recommended Age – 15+

Cast

Gwen Davies.....	Remy Beasley
Mr Orchard and Mr Francis.....	Matthew Bulgo
Speaker, Luke Williams, Councillor Williams	Dyfan Dwyfor
Archie Lush.....	Roger Evans
Clerk, Ross Doherty.....	Ross Foley
Herbert Morrison MP, Mr Howells.....	Jon Furlong
Neil Jones.....	Daniel Hawksford
Mrs Jones, The Cleaner.....	Bea Holland
Clement Attlee, Matron.....	Stephanie Jacob
Nurse Ellie and Arianwen.....	Kezrena James
Doctor Dain and Winston Churchill.....	Tony Jayawardena
Owen Thomas, Councillor Morgan.....	Michael Keane
Neville Chamberlain, Dr. Frankel, Mr Hill, Doctor Voiceover.....	Nicholas Khan
Lucy Pritchard, Doctor Voiceover.....	Rebecca Killick
Ensemble and Swing.....	Oliver Llewellyn-Jenkins

Mark Smith, Mr Leslie, Graham the Porter.....Mark Matthews
David Bevan, Councillor Hopkins, Doctor Voiceover.....Rhodri Meilir
William Jones, Mr Llywellyn, Chris the Porter.....Ashley Mejri
Jack Stockton.....Lee Mengo
Mr Fury.....David Monteith
Ensemble and Swing.....Mali O'Donnell
Sara Roberts, Mrs Lewis.....Sara Otung
Aneurin 'Nye' Bevan.....Michael Sheen
Jennie Lee.....Sharon Small



Creative Team

Writer.....	Tim Price
Director.....	Rufus Norris
Set Designer.....	Vicki Mortimer
Costume Designer.....	Kinnetia Isidore
Lighting Designer.....	Paule Constable
Co-Choreographer.....	Steven Hoggett
Co-Choreographer.....	Jess Williams
Composer.....	Will Stuart
Sound Designer.....	Donato Wharton
Projection Designer.....	Jon Driscoll
Casting Director.....	Alastair Coomer CDG
Casting.....	Chloe Blake
Dialect Coach.....	Patricia Logue
Company Voice Work.....	Cathleen McCarron
Company Voice Work.....	Tasmin Newlands
Consultant Medical Advisor.....	Matt Morgan
Associate Director.....	Francesca Goodridge
Associate Set Designer.....	Matt Hellyer
Associate Costume Designer.....	Zoë Thomas-Webb
Projection Design Associate.....	Gemma Carrington

Content Warning Details

Including Timestamps

Mental Health / Medical

Hospitalisation

- Whole Play - most of the performance is situated in the hospital.

Illness and disease

- Whole Play - the majority of the play is based in an NHS hospital with the illness of Nye who has cancer.

Claustrophobia

- Nye and his father are in a coal mine (1:13:10 – 1:19:35)

Violence and Abuse

Abuse / Verbal Abuse

- Argument between Jennie and Archie. Many insults are hurled back and forth between them (1:38:30 – 1:40:47)

Child Abuse

- Mr Orchard hits the children on the hand with the cane (0:15:30 – 0:18:40)

Discrimination

Classism

- Arguments between Neville Chamberlain and Nye around benefits and welfare involving the rich and poor (0:47:25 – 0:54:07)

Ableism

- Whole play - there are many instances throughout where Nye has a stammer and is mocked for it.

Death and Trauma

Death / Dying

- Whole play - The majority of the play is based around Nye slowly dying in Hospital
- Opening Prologue. The screens close in around Nye, symbolising death (0:30 – 0:1:38)
- An uncomfortable wheezing sound can be heard throughout Act One, Scene Two (0:08:28 – 0:12:32)
- Nye's father dies in his arms at the end of Act Two (1:10:45 – 1:13:06)
- Final scene is of Nye dying. Quite emotionally charged speeches from Jennie and Archie regarding his passing. He is surrounded by the people who love him (2:09:45 – 2:13:30)
- Symbolic death (2:13:30 – 2:16:59)

Child Death

- Jennie and Archie speak about Jennie and Nye's marriage and how they lost a baby (1:01:30 – 1:03:15)

Explicit Content, Others

Explicit Language

- Whole play - there are frequent uses of explicit language throughout

Gore

- An unsettling scene where Doctor Dain pulls coal out of Nye's body (2:07:50 – 2:08:45)

Flashing Images / Strobe Lighting (Seizure Warning)

- WWII parliamentary scene during war with loud and sudden bangs. Flashing lights as the buildings are destroyed. (1:04:15 – 1:07:51)

War

- WWII parliamentary scene during war with loud and sudden bangs. (1:04:15 – 1:07:51)

Loud and sudden noises

- WWII parliamentary scene during war with loud and sudden bangs (1:04:15 – 1:07:51)

Plot Synopsis with Timestamps

Prologue – NHS Royal Free Hospital Hampstead 1960 – Present (0:00:30)

Nye stands in his pyjamas as the curtains slowly close in around him, symbolising death. Nye screams for his sister Arianwen's help.

Act One, Scene One – NHS Royal Free Hospital Hampstead 1960 – Present (0:01:38)

A busy NHS Ward opens Act One. Eight beds and curtains surround the stage with doctors and nurses attending to various patients. Jennie and Archie are awaiting any news as to the current condition of Nye's health. Nye is wheeled onto the ward on a bed and Archie leaves to find the doctor. Nye comes around and speaks to Jennie. Dr Dain arrives to examine Nye and explain the operation, but Jennie stops him from explaining further; it is clear there is something else wrong. Nurse Ellie arrives and helps to administer pain relief to Nye. Jennie and Dr Dain leave while Ellie and Nye speak about Nye being in the hospital. It is obvious that Nye is a very well-known person who has helped the NHS in some way. As Nye counts down from ten, the sound becomes distorted, and Nye falls asleep.

Scene Two – The Nye Family Home – Past (0:08:28)

We move to the family home where Nye has woken up when his sister, Arianwen, comes in to deliver him some food. Nye and Arianwen argue about him coming home late and not spending time with their ill father, David. Nye has a lot of responsibility with his union work which is low paying and therefore he walks home instead of getting the bus. Nye is fearful about David's death, angry at the state of healthcare and wishes to do something about it. It begins to become noticeable that Nye has a stutter.

Scene Three – Sirhowy Elementary School – Past (0:12:32)

The scene opens to Nye's childhood classmates singing and Mr Orchard standing on a chair. Mr Orchard immediately begins to berate Nye and then asks the children to start reading from a book; getting individual children to sections. When it comes to Nye, he struggles to read the words, so Archie comes to his defence, "He's gorra a stutter sir, why don' you ask one of us to read?" Mr Orchard then proceeds to hit Nye on the hand with his cane multiple times. The children all band together to stick up for Nye, offering their hands to be caned.

The children fight back against Mr Orchard, grabbing his cane and lifting him up. He continues to swipe for the children as they circle him.

Scene Four – NHS Royal Free Hospital Hampstead 1960 – Present (0:18:40)

Archie and Jennie are in the hospital room with Nye sitting in his bed, sedated and asleep. They speak about Dr Dain and how Jennie purposefully didn't disclose something to Nye when he was awake. "You're making a mistake", Archie protests. Jennie is annoyed about her career sacrifices throughout her marriage.

Scene Five – Tredegar Workingman's Library – Past (0:24:34)

Archie and Nye are in the library. They are incredibly excited about being able to choose any book at any time, whenever they want. They discuss Nye's stutter and which words trigger his stutter, 'Well it hasn't got a 'ssss' in it has it?' They proceed to look at all the books in the library to find new words to replace those he can't say.

Scene Six – Tredegar Workingman's Library – Past (0:32:26)

Jack, Archie, Gwen, Neil and Nye have been blacklisted and are struggling to find work. They realise that they need to be elected members of the board to confront the Tredegar Iron and Coal Company, to get more protections for workers; "We are going to read constitutions, articles of association and when we know how every one of them works, we're going to get elected."

The scene shifts to a Tredegar Town Council Board Meeting. The five new councillors use their knowledge to elect Nye as Chairman and to put each one of them onto a specific board as a council representative.

More and more townspeople arrive to ask questions culminating with Nye having, "now been elected chairman of: The Justice of the Peace, the Miners' Combined Lodge, the Labour Party, the Town Guardians, the Medical Aid Society, the Hospital Trust and the Working Men's institute, as well as Member of Parliament for Ebbw Vale!"

Scene Seven – Houses of Parliament – Past (0:47:25)

Jennie gives a speech within the houses of Parliament, where Nye first sees her. Nye has a heated argument with Neville Chamberlain about benefits for the working class, the disparity between the rich and poor, and the hypocrisy of bailing out the banks, "You use the sacred emblems of patriotism to further the racket of protecting profits!"

Scene Eight – House of Commons Stranger's Bar – Past (0:54:07)

Nye and Jennie meet for the first time. They playfully banter back and forth but find common ground with being outcasts within the political sphere. Nye asks her out to help him choose a suit, but she politely declines to which Nye says, "Frank stood you up?" Jennie does not take this well and Nye makes an "idiot" of himself during his apology. Nye walks Jennie home.

Scene Nine – NHS Royal Free Hospital Hampstead 1960 – Present (0:59:32)

Archie and Jennie are in the hospital room where Jennie explains to Archie about her marriage with Nye, how she knows about their affairs with other people and that Archie has covered for Nye. Jennie then talks about how they previously lost a baby. Nye takes a turn for the worse.

Scene Ten – House of Commons – Past (1:04:15)

Set during the war there are loud and sudden bangs from outside as the buildings are destroyed. Chamberlain is discussing the wartime successes, but Nye stands up and “undermines” the government by stating they are not doing enough to help the people. Winston Churchill appears and gives a speech about victory which Nye doesn’t agree with, “this house has no confidence in the general direction of the war.”

Scene Eleven – Family Home – Past (1:07:51)

Arianwen and Nye are once again arguing about the state of David's health and how Nye has been avoiding them all, “You’ve made me a tool to avoid this.” Nye goes to see David and comforts him as he dies in his arms, “I’m going to look after everyone for you.”



Act Two, Scene One – Ty Trist Mine – Past (1:13:10)

Nye and David are in a coal mine. David uses a coal seam and expert coal miners mining as a lesson for life, “Study what you’re up against. Don’t fear it. Don’t flinch. Don’t doubt yourself. Because one true blow can last a lifetime.”

Scene Two – Houses of Parliament Tearooms – Past (1:19:35)

Churchill and Nye chat in the tearooms about how Nye has been a critic of Churchill and how he is “universally despised” by the general public. Nye points out the hypocrisy in how Churchill only stops attacking the working class when the ruling class is under threat. Churchill then tells Nye that he wants his support in a ‘vote of confidence in the government’ because it will help to build allyship with America against Hitler. Nye begrudgingly agrees.

Scene Three – 10 Downing Street – Past (1:28:01)

Nye meets Clement Attlee who proposes to make Nye the Minister for Health and Housing. Nye is suspicious that he is being set up to fail as he states, “you’ve calculated that the one person who could derail everything now, is me.” Attlee explains they want to unite both sides of the Labour Party for “the good of the people”, and gives Nye a ministerial briefcase.

As Nye opens the briefcase he is confronted by multiple people who are in dire need of medical assistance. He keeps on hearing fragments from the past (Arianwen) and present (Jennie, Dr Dain).

Scene Four – NHS Royal Free Hampstead Hospital 1960 – Present (1:39:00)

Jennie opens the scene realising she has made a mistake not telling Nye about the extent of his health. Archie arrives and a heated argument breaks out between the two of them with Archie accusing her “the more isolated he gets, the more important you become.” She replies that he is just a “bloody social climber.”

Nurse Ellie arrives and explains how they need to be there for each other and for Nye.

Scene Five – House of Commons Cabinet Office – Past (1:42:17)

Herbert Morrison enters and wants to hear Nye’s planned Health Bill, but he is reluctant because he does want to “water down his vision”. Nye explains that there is a disparity between the rich and poor, and he wants to implement a system similar to the Medical Aid Society in Tredegar by nationalising the hospitals. Morrison is unconvinced by the proposal and suggests alterations to the bill. Despite this, Nye gets cabinet backing for his bill but Attlee warns him that he needs the backing of the British Medical Association (BMA).

Scene Six – The BMA Negotiating Council 1946 – Past (1:52:47)

Part One: BMA Council. Nye negotiates with the British Medical Association Council and fails to get backing.

Part Two: Labour Party. Morrison and Attlee berate Nye for not achieving his goal and urge him to get the doctors to change their mind.

Part Three: Once more Nye tries to convince the BMA Council that the system needs to change, “I consider the main interference to the integrity of doctor–patient relations to be personal profit.” Negotiations fail and end.

Part Four: Parliament. Churchill and Nye battle it out, arguing for and against the NHS.

Part Five: BMA Council. A vote is held with Doctors who vote against the bill.

Part Six: Labour Party / Press / Parliament / Home. This part is a merging of different timelines simultaneously, with sound fragments throughout the past and present. Nye recalls his Father’s advice, “One True Blow.” Nye decides to go ahead with the implementation of the NHS on 5 July 1948 with or without the Doctors, however he compromises with the BMA to find an agreement. The BMA agree and the NHS is founded.

Scene Seven – NHS Royal Free Hampstead Hospital – Dream (2:05:50)

Nye wakes up in the hospital and speaks to Dr Dain. Dain plunges his arm into Nye’s stomach and pulls out coal. The sudden realisation hits Nye that he is dying and he calls out for his wife.

Scene Eight – NHS Royal Free Hampstead Hospital 1960 – Present (02:09:47)

Jennie and Archie realise that it is time for Nye to pass on. They exchange some heartfelt words with Nye on his deathbed. Nye passes away and is supported by Doctors, Nurses, matrons, porters, consultants, therapists, the whole family of NHS carers as they carry him safely, with loving care and dignity. Ending with his promise to his father, “Dad. Did I. Did I look after everyone?”

The End

Find Out More

We hope that you have enjoyed watching and studying Nye. Don't forget that there are many more fantastic productions to explore as part of the National Theatre 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?](#)

Watch

In Conversation with Michael Sheen and Rufus Norris, National Theatre Live
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6hJZ1im_Ec

Learning Hub

You can find more resources for schools and teachers on the National Theatre's Learning Hub. Search by key stage, subject, theatrical style or practitioner and discover an ever-growing library of short films, learning guides and digital exhibitions.

Find out more: <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/learn-explore/schools/teacher-resources>

National Theatre Archive

More materials relating to the production including the costume bible, poster, prompt scripts, programmes, stage management reports and more are held at the National Theatre Archive, which is free to visit.

Find out more: <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/archive>

Our Funders

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Thank you