

PILOT THEATRE PRESENT

CRONGTON

KNIGHTS

RESOURCE PACK

CRONGTON KNIGHTS

By Alex Wheatle

Adapted by Emteaz Hussain

Directed by Corey Campbell and Esther Richardson

Co-production with Belgrade Theatre Coventry, Derby Theatre and York Theatre Royal.

Resource pack written by Carolyn Bradley

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A further resource pack will be released after the production has opened, including more content which students exploring the play will find useful, such as scene extracts, production photographs and further details of the design elements.

With thanks to the cast, creative, production, and admin teams for your contributions towards creating and developing this pack.

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TOUR DATES

BELGRADE THEATRE, COVENTRY

8 - 22 FEB

YORK THEATRE ROYAL

25 - 29 FEB

THEATRE ROYAL, BRIGHTON

4 - 7 MAR

THE LOWRY, SALFORD

10 - 14 MAR

DERBY THEATRE

17 - 21 MAR

LAWRENCE BATLEY THEATRE

1 MAR - 04 APR

THEATRE PECKHAM, LONDON

22 APR - 9 MAY

INTRODUCTION THE SHOW

"I don't know why I listened to you about going on this mission! Now we're in the middle of nowhere dot com, buses ain't rolling, and they're gonna beat us down, shank us, and then fling us in some big bin!"

Life isn't easy on the Crongton Estate and for McKay and his mates it's all about keeping their heads down. But when a friend finds herself in trouble, they set out on a mission that goes further than any of them imagined.

Crongton Knights will take you on a night of madcap adventure as McKay and his friends, 'The Magnificent Six', encounter the dangers and triumphs of a mission gone awry. In this world premiere adaptation of Alex Wheatle's award-winning novel, the pulse of the city is alive on stage with a soundscape of beatboxing and vocals laid down by the cast and created by acclaimed musician Conrad Murray.

Crongton Knights is about the friends you'll never forget and how lessons learned the hard way can bring you closer together.

ONLINE RESOURCES:

Alex Wheatle - fictional world building, creating new language and seeing yourself in a book:

Can you tell us about the world of Crongton, the setting for all your children's books?

Alex Wheatle: What happens when diverse readers see themselves reflected in fiction, BookTrust: [Link to article](#)

SYNOPSIS

Set on the South Crongton council estate, Crongton Knights follows the life of 14-year-old McKay Tambo. Life for McKay has been tough, he has recently lost his mum in a hit and run accident. He lives in constant fear of bailiffs at their door while his dad works long hours to repay a vast debt. McKay is a talented chef and often cooks to distract himself from being left home alone. His brother, Nesta, is always out on his bike tempting trouble on the borders between South Crongton and North Crongton.

The story begins when Nesta rides his bike into North Crongton looking for trouble, and during a fight has his bike stolen by Festus Livingstone from the Major Worries Crew. Nesta goes to the police station to report that his bike has been stolen. On the journey home, McKay tells Nesta that he has heard a rumour at school that he beat up Festus Livingstone and he is in the hospital with a head injury. McKay worries that the Major Worries crew will now come after Nesta.

At school, Venetia reveals to Saira that V's ex-boyfriend, Sergio, has explicit pictures of her on a phone he is keeping even though they have split up. Bit has agreed to help V get the phone back so she can delete the pictures, but it involves a journey to Notre Dame which means going through North Crongton. The divide between South and North Crongton is strong with different crews operating in different postcodes. A journey to North Crongton is dangerous and risky for the group. Bit asks Jonah and McKay to help them. McKay agrees to support but Jonah is reluctant to put himself in danger going to Notre Dame and is preoccupied with trying to ask Saira out. When Saira approaches and talks about their mission, Jonah agrees to come with them.

That evening, the mission starts when McKay, Jonah and Bit get together. BushKid (BK) who also goes to their school but lives in a different and more affluent neighbourhood in Crongton comes past on her bike. She tries to join them on the mission after McKay stood up for her at school. McKay rejects the offer as they want to keep the mission quiet and within their crew.

They meet Saira and V along the way, and they start to work out their plan at Notre Dame. Jonah gets cold feet; V says it's fine to drop out and then Saira actively encourages him to leave. When she says this Jonah decides he is back on the mission to save face with her. BK arrives at the bus stop; she tries to get involved with the mission again but the group reject her.

They get on the bus to Notre Dame; BK follows the bus on her bike. She sees Festus Livingstone and his crew are running for the bus and warns them that they are on their way. McKay hides as Festus and his crew join the bus. As they reach Central Crongton, they see a full-on riot has broken out. Festus and his crew jump off the bus to join it. They all acknowledge that without BK's warning they would've been in a lot of trouble.

On arrival to Notre Dame, they decide that BK can be a lookout for them. They cautiously go up through Sergio's estate to his door. V asks Sergio for her phone back but he begins attempting a reconciliation to get back together. He grabs Venetia's arm for her to come inside, Bit jumps forward pushing Sergio into his flat and Saira follows him and jumps on Sergio. There is a fight between them all, McKay knocks Sergio out. Venetia finds the phone and they quickly leave.

As they start their journey home, they are stopped by the Hunchbackers Crew. The Chief Hunchbacker pulls a knife and tells them to give him their phones and BK's bike as a tax for coming to North Crongton. V refuses to give her phone to the Chief Hunchbacker who then punches her in the face and gives a warning to the rest of the group who give him their possessions. They comfort each other after the mugging by the Hunchbackers and head for the bus home.

Jonah asks V why she didn't just give the Hunchbackers her phone straight away and V explains she won't give into people like the Hunchbackers after what happened to her cousin, Colette, who was shot accidentally outside school when two crews were fighting. When they get to the bus stop, they find out buses aren't running because of the riot and try and pool their funds together to get a minicab but there is a 40-minute wait and they only have £7. They manage to get a taxi but the driver kicks them out when he realises they don't have the full fare.

They start the journey home again on foot, they hear music and agree to check out the rave they are passing. McKay and BK notice that Festus is at the party, they tell the others and try to sneak out but one of Festus's crew notices BK in her school uniform. They try to run and McKay trips hitting his head hard on the concrete. Festus comes down to McKay and takes a knife out and tells his crew to take all of them to the garage.

In the garage, Festus gives McKay his phone to call Nesta. He tells Nesta to come to the garages and he agrees, giving a harsh warning to Festus if he touches McKay. While time passes, V gets increasingly angered by Festus and his crew. When Nesta arrives V flies towards Festus and stabs something into his neck. Nesta, seeing what has happened, calls for an ambulance and gets McKay and his friends into the car. V is scared about what she has done and everyone reassures her that if she hadn't taken that decision it would've ended the other way round. When they finally get home, they all tell their parents what happened, and it gives Nesta, McKay and their Dad an opportunity to openly deal with their issues.

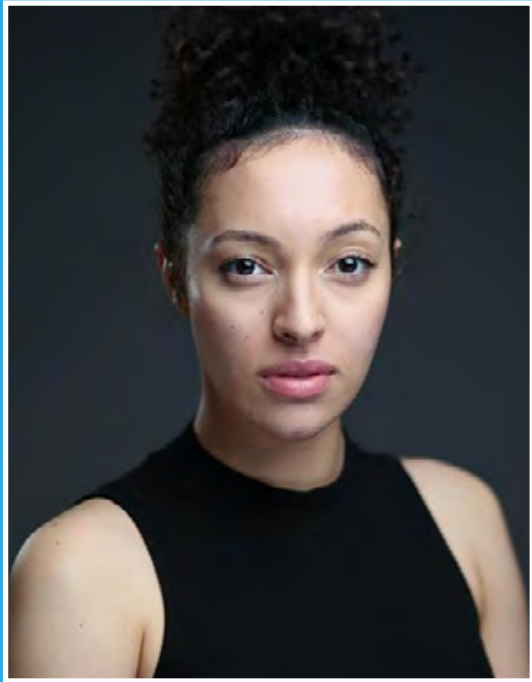
The next day at school, Nesta comes and tells McKay that Festus is out of hospital and that he needs to keep a low profile because Festus is saying he stabbed him to save his reputation. He tells McKay to do something with his life and his talent for cooking. McKay decides to join his school after-school cooking club.



**“IT’S BONKERS LIVING HERE
BUT WHEN THINGS ARE ON A LEVEL,
BRUVS AND SISTERS CHILL,
SOCCER GAMES BOOT OFF IN THE PARK,
SUMMER JAMS PUMP OUT BLASTING”**

- MCKAY

THE CAST



Aimee Powell

Venetia/Yvonne



Kate Donnachie

BushKid



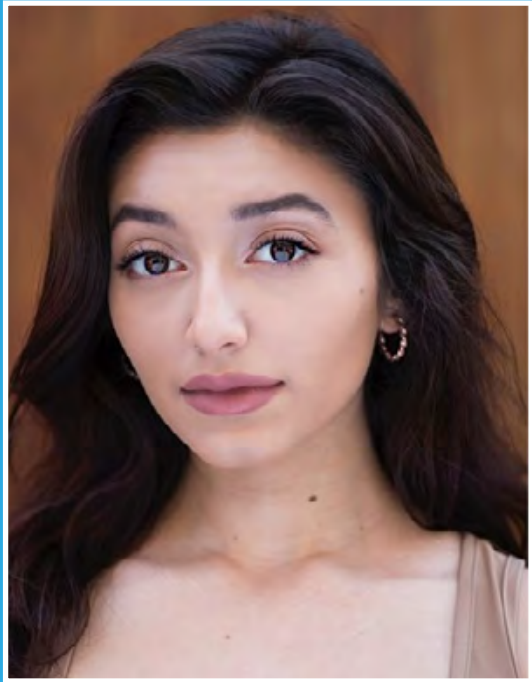
Khai Shaw

Jonah



Marcel White

Nesta



Nigar Yeva

Saira



Olisa Odele

McKay



Simi Egbejumi-David

Festus/Dad/Sergio



Zak Douglas

Bit

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES:

Hear Alex Wheatle read from *Liccle Bit*, the first book in the Crongton series that contextualises some of the relationships, characters and geography of *Crongton Knights*.



MCKAY, AGED 15 - McKay is warm, funny and shy. Also diplomatic. He is mad about cooking and food and wants to be a chef. He is dealing with the recent loss of his Mum, who was killed in a hit-and-run accident and growing up in an all-male household. His Dad and big brother Nesta are often arguing and McKay is often left to his own devices as his Dad works long shifts to pay off debts. He has sometimes been teased about his weight.

BIT, AGED 15 - Bit is the leader of the boy's gang. He's brave and loyal. He's the most confident of the boys, and the only one with a fully developed female friendship (with Venetia). Bit has direct experience of some of the troubles in the area, which gives him more maturity than the others. In the past, Bit agreed to hide a gun for local gang leader Manjaro, who then blackmailed him. Bit threw the gun into the canal and was beaten up by Manjaro, who has now gone missing. Bit is constantly on edge thinking Manjaro will return.

JONAH, AGED 15 - Jonah is cautious, and the first to see trouble. He focuses on self-preservation, often putting himself first, and is very reluctant to come on the mission. Sometimes he is a bit of a coward. Jonah thinks he has a great appeal to girls and wants to hook up with Saira. Jonah's parents argue all the time and they are not around for him, and he heavily depends his friendship with Bit and McKay.

VENETIA, AGED 15 - Venetia is a brave, complex, headstrong and determined girl. V has a very religious family but has been secretly dating a young man (in his early twenties), Sergio. Now the relationship has ended she has to confront the ways in which he has exploited her. V's cousin, Collette, was accidentally caught in crossfire between local gangs and was killed, and she is angry and bitter about this.

SAIRA, AGED 15 - Saira is assured, determined and a leader. She emigrated to the UK four or five years ago and knows how to look out for herself. She is a loyal friend. She's smart and brave. Saira came from a Turkish town on the Syrian border and her father is still missing in Syria. She has experienced the trauma of moving to a new country but has found acceptance in the situation. She may be the strongest of all the characters because of her life experience.

BUSHKID, AGED 15 - An outsider, who initially stands apart from the whole group. BushKid is never without her bike. She's chosen to belong here and she will not give up until she is accepted. BK is from a more affluent home than some of the others but her parents work so hard they are never around. She is seeking friendship. There was an incident before the play starts in which a group at school stole BushKid's tablet, and McKay got it back for her. Since this, BushKid has wanted to repay McKay's kindness to her.

NESTA, AGED 17/18 - Nesta is McKay's big brother who the group look up to. He is also a loner who can lose his patience easily. Nesta is dealing with the recent loss of his Mum and is trying to take on the role of parent to McKay. Nesta's grief has led him to get involved in some trouble with other local teenage boys, and recently he had his bike stolen by Festus Livingstone's gang and got into a fight with Festus, who is now planning revenge.

THEMES AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE PLAY

Reading around the wider social issues of the play will deepen your students' understanding of it, and help them understand the world in which the play takes place. Links can also be made to PSCHEE schemes of work and these themes can be used as devising stimuli.

FAMILY

Each character tells us something about their family throughout the play, and there is a theme of family trauma. For example, McKay, Saira and V have all lost a member of their family through violence. There is also a theme of family disagreements, paralleled between Jonah and McKay's families who both argue. However, whilst most characters have some difficulty in their family life at home, they find love, loyalty, acceptance and understanding in the friendships that develop in the play.

Discussion points:

- How does losing their mum seem to affect McKay and Nesta differently?
- Jonah isn't on board with the mission at the start, and says "I only came because you're my bredrins!" Could this be because he feels unfaltering loyalty to the boys, or because he is escaping his own family life?
- Families often argue but love still runs deep, could you say this is the same with the friendships in the play?
- BushKid comes from a more wealthy family, but says "I'd rather we didn't have money" – what would make BushKid more happy?
- How does Nesta and McKay's family dynamic change throughout the play?

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

"he just vanished - we have, we had a lot of relatives in Syria my Dad was always going there to help them, we used to have a shop in Urfa but we had to close it down, that's why we ended up here we were getting threatened n that" – Saira

Saira's family come from Urfa in Turkey, near to the Syrian border. Her family have fled to the UK due to the Syrian conflict. More than 17,000 Syrian refugees have come to the UK in the last five years, with 3000 more expected by the end of 2020. Like Saira, many families have lost loved ones in the conflict, or families have been split up.

You can read some people's stories about moving to the UK [here](#).

Discussion points:

- Saira says "Syria –the war there, McKay makes this Crongton stuff seem pathetic you know what I'm saying don't ya?" How do you think her life experience affects the way she acts in the play?
- Imagine you are new to the UK from a different country, what would you find strange and hard to get used to?
- [Read this article](#) about people who have disappeared in the Syrian conflict, like Saira's dad, and discuss how she must feel about this.

GUN AND KNIFE CRIME IN THE UK

"we're going to get beat down, shanked and flung us in some North Crong bin." – Jonah

Whereas crime relatively is decreasing in the UK, violent crime has risen, and particularly incidents of knife crime. There are more knife crime incidents in London than anywhere else in the UK, and most incidents involve people over 18, although 1 in 5 incidents involve young people. NHS statistics show that knife injuries are becoming more severe, and with an increasing number of girls involved.

You can see some statistics about violent crime in the UK [here](#).

Discussion points:

- Look at the different points in the play where a weapon is used and discuss why this is. Are there different reasons and justifications for using a weapon? What could the alternatives be?
- It could be said that young people in some areas of the UK are trapped in a cycle of knife crime, and are exploited at a young age, like Bit is by Manjaro. How could this cycle be broken to give young people a chance to escape violent crime?
- Venetia is angry about the death of her cousin Colette, and yet she is the one who stabs Festus at the end of the play. Discuss the circumstances surrounding this event, and how this happened.

SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

"naked pics of any girl on any phone went nuclear at school. Sharon Goddard in year 11, she was so traumatised she left school, no ones' seen her since"
- McKay

Several characters in the play explore their feelings for each other, which is very healthy and normal for their age. However, the relationship between Venetia and Sergio was not a healthy one, and it is illegal for Sergio to have nude or sexual images of V on his phone, and for Venetia to have sent them, as she is under 18. Even 'temporary' images on apps such as Snapchat can be screenshotted and saved. It is never OK to feel pressured into doing anything that you don't want to do with a partner.

Sexting, which means sending intimate or naked pictures or videos to someone, is illegal if you are under 18. It is also illegal for an adult (over 18) to send any nude or sexual image or video to someone under 18.

Discussion points:

- Discuss how Venetia talks about Sergio, what impressions do you get of the type of relationship they had?
- Why does Sergio promise he will change and be different when Venetia goes to his house, and do you believe him?
- McKay tells the story of Sharon Goddard – discuss what happened to Sharon and how this could have been prevented.
- Jonah says, "why do girls do that - let guys take them kinda of pics". What do you think the answer is to this question?
- What could you do if you feel pressured to send a nude picture to someone?

THE 2011 RIOTS

In the play, a riot kicks off in Central Crongton. This was heavily influenced by the real 2011 riots in the UK, which took place in Manchester, Birmingham and London. Shops were burnt down, shop windows were smashed and items from shops were stolen by hundreds of people over four days across the country. Over 1000 people were arrested. People were left homeless after buildings were destroyed, and businesses were ruined after shops were damaged and goods were looted.

The riots were connected to the death of Mark Duggan, who was shot by police on 4th August 2011. A peaceful protest took place outside Tottenham Police Station in London as the family said they wanted justice for Mark's death. Later that night, violence erupted with bottles being thrown at police, and then violence and rioting spread out of control in a wave of what was referred to as "copycat" crimes.

Read about what happened in the August 2011 riots [here](#) and see a [timeline of the events here](#).

Discussion points:

- In the play, one of the stage directions describes "Groups of kids marching to Central Crong! messages being spread to 'blitz the high street.'" In the 2011 riots, a lot of the organisation happened via social media. Do you think social media companies are responsible? Should people who received messages just have ignored them? Would this not have happened if we didn't have access to social media platforms?
- Saira says "in a world that tells you you're nothing, sometimes people just wanna get even" – What does Saira mean by this? Do you think this explains why people may have thought looting and rioting was acceptable behaviour?
- Jonah would rather be on the High Street than on MissionV to start with – "I could stay behind, get me some airmax and an Iphone11" – what do you think motivates these thoughts?



POVERTY

“look at Crong from up here – it’s all the same. makes you think North and South, what’s the difference? same poverty everywhere.” – McKay

The [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), who are a charity working to resolve poverty in the UK, define poverty as:

“Poverty means not being able to heat your home, pay your rent, or buy the essentials for your children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money. It means facing marginalisation – and even discrimination – because of your financial circumstances. The constant stress it causes can lead to problems that deprive people of the chance to play a full part in society.”

In the prologue, Jonah raps that they have “poverty lickin’ our asses” and in the play, we see various examples of characters struggling to make ends meet. For example, we know that McKay needs to borrow money for the bus fare and later to buy food, and McKay’s dad has the “debt brothers” knocking at his door.

Discussion points:

- Could you make a connection between the poverty that affects the area of Crongton, and the rioting and looting in the high street?
- Does the theme of poverty make the stealing of the bikes and phones in the play even more poignant?
- Jonah admits to “look, I really need some new trainers and a new phone, am using my mums brick” and Bit refers to Jonah’s dad not having a job. What does this insight tell us about Jonah and how he behaves in the play?

JOURNEYS

The play takes place over one eventful night in Crongton where the characters go on a journey together, and ends with them all having been on a journey in their friendships and relationships with each other. Nesta also ends the play by going on a journey of his own, away from Crongton for a while.

Discussion points:

- Discuss the difference between the literal and metaphorical journeys in the play
- Who goes on the biggest 'journey' in terms of how their character develops in the play?
- What journey has BushKid been on since she started at the high school?
- McKay talks about his memory of a journey to Warwick Castle – discuss this memory and why it is so special to him.

Where to find help if students are affected by any of the issues explored in the play:

- Childline – useful information about Sexting and also general support 24 hours a day: www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/sexting/
- The Mix – Information for under 25's on housing, money, relationships, crime and much more.
www.themix.org.uk
- Knife Free – a charity helping young people go knife free, with help and support online for young people.
www.knifefree.co.uk/

PRE-SHOW WORKSHOP

This workshop is approximately 1 hour in length, but exercises can be taken out and done in isolation. The activities would give students a useful introduction to the characters of the play before they see the performance.

The Prologue (30 minutes)

- Ask the group what a prologue is? What is its role in a play?
- Read the prologue from Crongton Knights together
- Put students in groups of 6, and ask them to discuss what they learn about the world of Crongton from this short extract? What do you find out about the characters in the story? What do you think the writer wants you to find out?
- In their groups, ask them to cast the 6 characters and think about how they would stage to give the show an exciting introduction. They might want to work from the stage direction 'singing and rapping to create the right vibe'. You could use this beatbox beat to support your students:



Encourage them to find a way to introduce each character giving an insight into who they are – whether through voice, physicality, action, still images etc.

- Perform these scenes and discuss them. Ask students to evaluate: What stood out to you?

Prologue

Singing and rapping to create the right vibe (Rough attempt - just to give an idea):

McKay: we're the Magnificent Six from the South Crong Estate McKay
Tambo, the big M - chef extraordinaire

Jonah: Jonah 'Rapid' Hani, they don't call me 'rapid' for nothing

Bit: Bit – Little Bit - Johnson - I may be little, but I'm big in here
(thumps his heart)

Venetia: Venetia King – call me V, seriously... or even queen!

Saira: Saira - Aslan - like Aslan the lion from that book, giving it big in the hood
- ennit!

BushKid: just call me Bushy – and I'm not from round here but.... Ripcorn Wood!

They look at Bushy and shake their heads. BK laughs like she knew they were going to react like that.

McKay: it's bonkers living here but when things are on a level, bruvv and sisters
chill, soccer games boot off in the park, summer jams pump out blasting

Venetia: let's be real, you all can't wait to get out of South Crong dump... Bit yeah,
cos of this never ending cycle of North-South Crong grief, beef
n violence n poverty licking our asses

McKay: I know it's bonkers living here, what's outside scares the living kidneys out
of us tho' – why is that?

Jonah: cos this is ours

Saira: our home

Venetia: we know it -

Bit: is out there any better anyway?

BushKid: and here's the story of how we became ...

All: The Crongton Knights!

Continuing to work on the prologue (30 minutes)

- From the feedback received, ask each group to redevelop their prologue scene.
- You might ask them to add in their own lines about each character. They could keep this in the performance style using the beat and writing rhymes, spoken word or rap.
- Ask each group to write their own chorus about the crew that they integrate into the scene.
- Add a competitive element with a prize for the strongest and most creative crew.

Character work

Understanding the Crew (10 minutes)

Resources: paper and pens, synopsis, character biographies in this pack

- Ask your students to get into 6 groups and assign each group a character from the crew (McKay, Bit, Jonah, BK, V and Saira).
- On a piece of paper, ask the group to draw the outline of a body.
- Ask them to discuss what facts we are told about the characters and what do other people tell you about the character
- In the body, students write or draw what is on the inside of the that person – who they are, how they feel, what personality traits do they have, what are their fears, love, passions, hates etc.
- On the outside around the body, students write or draw about how others see them – their preconceptions and assumptions etc.
- Share these ideas back.

Plenary (20 minutes) – Use the synopsis of the play

- In your groups, ask students to develop 6 still images, 1 representing each character.
- Each image should show the character's climax or most crucial point in the story.
- The images should clearly show who the main character is and how others feel about them.
- Ask students to work on each character's physicality and maintaining this in each image.
- Add bits of text and actions if it works.

If you have any questions about the content of this workshop or how to lead certain parts of it, please contact: oliver@pilot-theatre.com. Please feel free to share any content produced during this workshop with us via email or on social media. We would love to hear what your groups thought of the production.

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION

If your students are watching the show for their live theatre written exam, you might want to discuss what students are looking for before you see it:

1. Watch this beatbox teaser trailer with Conrad Murray, the musical director of the show:



2. How can music and sound be used to create mood/atmosphere or tension? Where would you expect to see this in the play?

3. How can lighting be used to create mood/atmosphere or create or change location in performance, and how do you expect this to be used in Crongton Knights?

4. Look at the images of the model box set in this pack. What can you ascertain already from the set about the style, location and themes of the production? How do you think this set might be used in performance?

5. Read the synopsis of the play, and make a list of 5 key moments which you can look out for in performance – they might be moments of drama, tension, climax or potential comedy.

6. Having read the character breakdowns, synopsis and Prologue in this pack, discuss each character and what you will be looking for from the performances.

7. Think about how lighting can be used to create mood and atmosphere on stage. From reading the synopsis, how might you expect lighting to be used at different moments to create or change mood and atmosphere?

8. Read the information on the themes and social issues in the play, and if you have time – do some extra research and have class discussions on how these issues may be presented on the stage.

SET DESIGN

The set for Crongton Knights is a multi-functional rotating set, which the performers move themselves at various points in the show.

The set has multiple levels and angles used in creative ways by the performers throughout the performance – the set is used as the top deck of a bus, an apartment block, a school bench, a stage, a garage and much more.

Here is designer Simon Kenny talking about his design concept for Crongton Knights:

“We often think of urban environments as grey, concrete, grubby places, but I wanted to ensure our Crongton was full of life and colour, just like the characters in Alex Wheatle’s brilliant book.

The stage belongs to the Crongton Knights – it’s their space where they hang out and they can use it and change it however they like to tell their stories. The acting company was encouraged to do the same, improvising with how the space could be used fluidly in different configurations and across the various levels to help move the action along.

Using vibrant graffiti was our way of further injecting that life, colour and youthful energy into the space, while still keeping it firmly rooted in the cityscapes we all know. This street style also reflects the energetic movement and beatboxing used in the show. It was important that the graffiti felt as authentic as possible, so we were really excited to partner with a professional spray artist to create the graffiti that covers the set.

A knot of stairs, railings and alleys, shutters, landings and brickwork, all collaged together to suggest the various locations the story takes us to – we call the set ‘The Castle’, as it’s the place our very own Knights are at home.”

After students have seen the performance, they could do some of the following exercises:

- Make a list of all the different locations created by the set
- Describe your favourite moment and how the set was used to create this
- Sketch the set from memory, label everything you can remember and then check to see if you were right

- Discuss the shape, size, colour, materials and scale of the set design and the reasons and connotations behind those choices.
- Re-read Simon Kenny's explanation of his design concept, and link this to specific moments you remember from the performance
- Write a practice live theatre exam question answer using the set design of Crongton Knights as your chosen design element.



REHEARSALS

Photography by Robert Day















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