The Black Album
by Hanif Kureishi

A Tara Arts production with the National Theatre

Education Resource Pack
for Key Stage 4 and above

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'This is a long-over due look at a very urgent issue.'
The Daily Telegraph

Further production details:
tara-arts.com
nationaltheatre.org.uk

Please note, this production contains very strong language

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About Tara Arts

Over 30 Years of Connecting Cultures
No passports: positioned between East and West, TARA champions creative diversity through the production, promotion and development of world class, cross-cultural theatre.

No passports for the stories we tell
No passports for the artists we work with
No passports for our audiences

The company tours vibrant adaptations of European and Asian classics, brings the great stories of the world to children in junior schools and at TARA Studio, develops emerging artists and new audiences.

TARA's distinctive, 'Binglish' style of theatre, has resulted in co-productions with the National Theatre of Tartuffe (1990), The Little Clay Cart (1991) and Cyrano (1995) and now The Black Album (2009). The company has also staged an epic trilogy of plays on modern migration - Journey to the West (2002) and marked its 30th year in 2007 with its production of The Tempest.

Based in South London, TARA has toured the Netherlands, Ireland, France, Belgium, Spain, Turkey, Egypt, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, Australia, as well as England, Scotland and Wales.

"The most culturally open-minded troupe in Britain" Independent on Sunday

Patrons

Sir Richard Eyre CBE
Shobana Jeyasingh MBE
Naseem Khan OBE
Hanif Kureishi CBE
Baroness Usha Prashar CBE
Sir Salman Rushdie
Nitin Sawhney
The Black Album was written by Hanif Kureishi and is an adaptation of his 1995 novel. It is a co-production between Tara Arts and the National Theatre.

UK tour 2009

14 Jul – 7 Oct 2009
National Theatre 020 7452 3000
www.nationaltheatre.org.uk

20 – 24 Oct
West Yorkshire Playhouse 0113 213 7700
www.wyp.org.uk

27 – 31 Oct
Liverpool Playhouse 0151 709 4776
www.everymanplayhouse.com

10 – 14 Nov
Oxford Playhouse 01865 305305
www.oxfordplayhouse.com

17 – 21 Nov
Warwick Arts Centre 024 7652 4524
www.warwickartscentre.co.uk

24 – 27 Nov
Bath Theatre Royal 01225 448844
www.theatreroyal.org.uk
London 1989

When Shahid, with a love of books and writing, leaves home in suburban Sevenoaks to come to a third rate college in West London, he finds himself in a room next door to Riaz, an older student, who befriends him.

Shahid is searching for his own identity and Riaz recognizes this vulnerability and takes Shahid under his wing. He introduces him to a group of fellow muslim students, Chad, Hat, and Tahira.

Shahid is attracted to Riaz's certainties and is drawn into his group of friends. Meanwhile, he is also attracted to Deedee Osgood, his tutor. She encourages her students to study contemporary culture and Shahid is soon writing about the artist Prince, whose famous bootleg Black Album gives the play its title.

Meanwhile, Brownlow, Deedee's husband who also teaches at the college, is struggling to come to terms with the collapse of communism. He sees Riaz, and his politics, as the rightful heirs of the working class struggle.

Into this mix comes the reaction to Salman Rushdie's book, The Satanic Verses and the fatwa issued by the Ayatollah in Iran – and into Shahid's new life steps his brother, Chili, who has walked out on his upper-class wife, Zulma.

While Shahid's new friends are organising to protect a family under attack from racists, Chili and his friend Strapper are living dangerously in the drug and clubbing sub-culture of late 80s London.

Everyone is looking for answers, and when Riaz believes he's found a sign in the middle of an aubergine, Brownlow and the local council leader, George Rudder, decide it's good politics to humour him.

Shahid has agreed to help Riaz, by editing his poetry, but tensions mount, and Shahid realises that not everyone believes in creative freedom. A book is burnt and soon he and Deedee are running for their lives.
### Hanif Kureishi, writer

#### Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Born and brought up in Bromley, Kent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>First play, <em>Soaking the Heat</em>, staged at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Becomes Writer-in-Residence at the Royal Court.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Film <em>My Beautiful Laundrette</em>, Kureishi's screenplay is nominated for BAFTA Best Screenplay Award.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Film <em>Sammy and Rosie Get Laid</em>, screenplay by Kureishi, released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td><em>The Buddha of Suburbia</em> published. Wins the Whitbread Award for best first novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Release of <em>London Kills Me</em>, a film written and directed by Kureishi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Adapts <em>The Buddha of Suburbia</em> for BBC TV. Adaptation of <em>Mother Courage</em> produced as a mobile tour in the UK by the National Theatre's education department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Film release of <em>My Son the Fanatic</em>, adapted from his own short story. <em>Novella, Intimacy</em>, published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Production of <em>Sleep With Me</em> at the National Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td><em>When the Night Begins</em> produced at Hampstead Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Production of his play, <em>Venus</em>. Kureishi awarded the CBE for services to literature and drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>The stage adaptation of Kureishi's novel, <em>The Black Album</em>, is produced by the National Theatre and Tara Arts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“with the 20th anniversary of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie approaching, and since *The Black Album* is set in 1988/9 and concentrates on a small group of religious extremists, we thought my pre-7/7 novel might shed light on some of the things that have happened since... This was the period, or so I like to think, when Britain became aware it was changing.”

Hanif Kureishi in the *Guardian* on 30 June 2009

To read more, copy and paste this link to your browser:

http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/jun/29/hanif-kureishi-black-album
Director's vision

Hanif got in touch with me last year and asked whether I thought *The Black Album* could be adapted for the stage. I'd read the novel several years ago and so I read it and immediately got back to him and said, Yes, definitely, it could be a stage play. What is so fantastic about that novel is that it captures the moment, the real era-changing moment, that was 1989. On the one hand, we had the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, and on the other, we had the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

1989 was the year when the world as we know it now, with fundamentalist-driven terror and rapacious capitalism, began to emerge. I found that Hanif’s novel was the only one which examined the rise of Islamic fundamentalism within Britain.

The response to the Rushdie book was a bolt from the blue. We had no ways of coming to terms with how people had become suddenly astonishingly enraged and so censorious. And it’s not just censorship of the obvious kind that it is of interest to me, but how – in ourselves – we became censorious. A hesitation crept in post-1989 over the words ‘Muslim’, ‘Islam’, and ‘Race’. Hanif Kureishi’s novel has the makings of a ‘state-of-the-nation’ play. As such, it’s ideal for a co-production with the National Theatre.

It’s also the story of how an artist emerges. What does he lose? What does he have to leave behind in order not just to find his voice, but to find his voice in freedom? What happens, how does it happen? These are the questions that resulted in the shaping of the play. Its great virtue is that it’s a fun piece. For me, this coincides with something else: for many, many years, since coming to this country, race has been a kind of major cloud… not just cloud, but part of the air one breathes, and for many years I’ve been thinking, How do I make a comedy out of racism? Because, if we lose our sense of comedy, then we have allowed that humourless, censorious voice to drown out more subtle ideas. So, I want to have fun about racism and it seems to me that Hanif has provided me with the perfect material.
A day in rehearsal

THE BLACK ALBUM
Rehearsal Call
Friday 26th June
Rehearsal Room 2

10.00am Scene 2 - Shahid’s digs
Mr Andreou
Mr Bonnici
Mr Khan
Mr Kundra

11.00am Opening sequence to Scene 6 and beyond
Full company

Cottesloe Stage
1.00pm Voice Call with Jeannette Nelson

2.00pm Lunch

3.00pm Call continues
Full Company

4.30pm Fight call with Alison de Burgh
Scene 13 Chili’s Batman fight p.76 (All except Sean)
Scene 10 Heavies p.56 (Nitin, Sean, Jon, Glyn & Rob)
Scene 13 Tahira kicking Shahid p.76 (All except Sean)

If time
Scene 8 - Racist attack p.39 (All except Rob & Tanya)
Scene 10 - Chili hits Shahid p.58 (Rob, Glyn & John)
Scene 11 - Chad & Shahid headlock p.65 (All except Glyn & Rob)

6.00pm Call ends

(Tea breaks as required)

To read more about this rehearsal, go to Rehearsal Notes on page 7

To find out how Jeannette works with the actors, and to try out the exercises, go to Voice Workshop on page 8

In the fight rehearsal the idea is to make the fights seem as filmic as possible. Each move is choreographed, for both effectiveness and safety

When you watch the play, can you identify these scenes?

... and these fights?
Rehearsal notes

10.00am: Scene 2, Shahid’s Digs

Outside it’s a hot June day, but inside the cool concrete shell of the National Theatre we are transported to a time, twenty years ago, when old certainties are falling away and a young man is leaving home to go to college.

The actors rehearse on the newly-constructed set. It is a translucent mould of the perfect interior of an old London house, reminiscent of the houses by the artist Rachel Whiteread. It will eventually be lit and have images projected onto it, but for now it has the feel of a soft, almost padded room. Director, Jatinder Verma, describes it as a ‘memory space.’

Verma is focusing on the importance of key words. We are a couple of pages into the script and Riaz has come into Shahid’s room. It is the first time they have met, although Riaz has been watching Shahid and feels he already knows him.

Alexander (playing Riaz): You are a Pakistani at heart.

Jatinder Verma: What’s the power of that last phrase? And the power of the pause that follows it?

Suddenly, in that brief silence between Riaz and Shahid, a space opens up for the audience to consider what it means for Shahid to identify himself as Pakistani, or British, and we have begun to travel with him on his coming-of-age journey.

When Beruce, playing Hat, makes his first entrance he immediately embraces Jonathan (Shahid) with a half-hug and a slap on the back. The actors go over this again, realising that it is too familiar. The two characters have never met and even though the actors know each other well, they must explore a way of making this meeting seem new. Another run-through of the scene enables Beruce to find ways of opening up the stage picture, while finding a natural motivation to move.

There are also very practical things to consider, not least how to manage the food on stage. Each time they go through the scene, more of it is eaten until it’s all gone and they are miming. Riaz tucks in, oblivious to Shahid’s cry: ‘I’m desperate for good Indian food.’ Preparing the food is one of the many jobs undertaken by the stage management team. A request from the actors for meat is turned down on the ground of hygiene: there’s too great a risk of giving the actors tummy bugs.

What is their attitude to Deedee? And their attitude to the writer?’ Verma asks, as the actors explore how these three men talk about the same subject but from very different points of view. The subtext is crucial here. And yet in the midst of this serious material there is a playful humour, for example when Riaz says Hat doesn’t read books because he’s going to be an accountant, Beruce plays Hat’s hurt feelings with a simple change of expression, directed out to the audience.

Verma reminds the actors that every word is important, as might be expected from a novel condensed into the tighter structure of a play, but certain words in this scene are key: ‘meetings’, ‘originally’, ‘at heart’, ‘Deedee Osgood’. The challenge for the actors is to give these key words an energy and clarity that still sound natural and allow the sub-text to emerge freely.

The tone changes with Shahid’s admission of having felt he wanted to be a racist, and Chad’s entrance also brings another change of mood. Both Nitin Kundra (Chad) and Beruce Khan (Hat) originally come from the North East and their accents give a sense of the breadth of identity of British Islam, and help to emphasise the effect of meeting new people at college.

11am: Opening Sequence to Scene 6

The actors go back to the beginning to create the opening sequence to the sound of Sister Bliss. It’s an ‘in yer face’, high-impact movement piece which sets the scene of late 80s London. There’s a discussion about whether to keep this in at the beginning or use it elsewhere.

It’s in stark contrast to the opening dialogue, as Shereen Martineau takes on the character of Shahid’s mother, wishing her son well as he leaves home. Her line ‘don’t talk to strangers’ hangs in the air and we know that’s exactly what he’s going to do. The strangers he meets and the impact they have on him, will create the drama in this story.

Rehearsal photos (left: Alexander Andreou as Riaz and right: Jonathan Bonnici as Shahid) by Talula Sheppard
Voice workshop

The actors work with the National Theatre's Head of Voice, Jeannette Nelson. She takes them into the Cottesloe Theatre, where they will be performing in three weeks' time. At first, they explore the space and spread out across the auditorium to see and hear from the audience’s point of view. Then Jeannette takes the Company through a vocal warm-up, designed to get them used to working in the theatre, which has very different acoustics to the rehearsal room.

The Warm Up

Stretch your body, stretch the muscles between your ribs and reach out into the space.

Circle your shoulders and breath into the space between them, then throw the out-breath up to the gods (the back and top of the theatre).

Flop down and hang over, then go down into a squat, releasing the shoulders and breathing into the support muscles.

When you’re ready, let out three long sssss sounds.

Exercise the muscles in your face, finding space in the throat, in the jaw and in the upper chest.

Make sure your knees are soft, your shoulders open, your eyes and your heart are open. Be easy in the jaw, massage it, and then breathe out again into the space.

Let out three long zzzzz sounds and reach out to the seats right at the top and at the back. Choose three different spots, use all the breath but don’t go beyond where you breath is supported.

Love that in-breath!

Hum into your chest and back, thumping on them with your fists and then shaking your bottom, your arms and your shoulders, then open out the sound into the space.

Hum into your lips and around you face, yawn and stretch.

On a Haa sound, slide down and up in pitch, circle your arm with that sound.

Take a breath, as if you are taking the breath from out in the auditorium and try it again.

Remember to articulate clearly. Try these sounds: de-de-de, te-te-te, ga-ga-ga (with a dropped jaw).

Try kiggly-coo, kiggly-coo, kiggly-coo.

Once their voices are warmed up, Jeannette reminds the actors that the Cottesloe is a language theatre. It may seem like an intimate space, but in here, actors have to work just as hard to be clearly understood as they do in the larger Olivier theatre. The most important thing is not to fall off the end of the line.

‘So many English words end in unstressed syllables, there's a tendency to let them drop.’ As the actors run through their lines, she encourages them to experiment with how low in volume they can go; it is using their tongues dexterously which will create the clarity they need. She gives one last tip before the company leave the Cottesloe to go back to the rehearsal room: “practice a high hum, up in your head: it will open up your energy and dexterity”.

Photo (Tanya Franks as Deedee Osgood) by Talula Sheppard
Social context: 1989

Music
While the mainstream pop charts were turning out pretty saccharine stuff, topped by Kylie and Jason, fresh from Neighbours, the music scene beyond Top of the Pops was thriving. Madchester was at its peak, with Stone Roses, Happy Monday and Inspiral Carpets. De la Soul, Soul II Soul, acid house and techno were filling the clubs and illegal raves, fueled by Ecstasy, were bigger than ever and moving out to the countryside. White kids started rapping and Glastonbury was headlining world music stars such as The Bhundu Boys and Youssou N'Dour. The soundtrack for this production has been created especially by Sister Bliss of Faithless, quoting from Madonna, Prince and the bhangra-rap of the late 80s. It also includes music by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and, of course, Prince.

Prince
Born in 1958 and named Prince Rogers Nelson, 1989 was the last year when Prince was known as Prince, in 1990 he changed his name to The Artist Formally Known as Prince. After a brief spell where his name was just a symbol which nobody knew how to say, he reverted to being called Prince in 2000. The albums referred to in the script include: 1999 (1983), Purple Rain (1984), Lovesexy (1988) and the bootleg The Black Album (1987). This was only ever released as a promo. Referred to as The Funk Bible in press releases, it was released with no title, no artist's name and in a plain black sleeve. Rare originals fetch high prices, but fortunately it has now been re-released.

Communism: Europe and China
1989 was the year the Berlin Wall came down, re-uniting the former Communist states with the rest of Europe. In Poland the previously banned trade union, Solidarity, became the government. In Czechoslovakia the Velvet Revolution was led by playwright, Václav Havel. In Romania, President Ceaucescu was deposed and on Christmas day was executed on live television. In China, however, pro-democracy protests were brutally put down and many died in Tiananmen Square.

Fatwa
On 14 February 1989 Ayatollah Khomeini, the spiritual leader of Iran, pronounced a fatwa on the author Salman Rushdie in response to Rushdie's novel, The Satanic Verses. The novel was an allegorical story and some readers were offended by its portrayal of the Prophet Mohammed. However, many also condemned it without reading it. Born in India, to Muslim parents, Rushdie was widely published and had won the Booker Prize for his novel Midnight's Children. The fatwa was a death threat which some British Muslims supported. Copies of the book were publicly burnt in several cities and politicians on all sides sought to manipulate the situation for their own ends. Rushdie had to go into hiding for nine years. The Iranian government officially lifted the fatwa in 1998.
Costume design

Claudia Mayer’s costume design for Hat encapsulates the style of 1989.

You can see how she gathered her ideas on this mood board.

Costume designs by Claudia Mayer
Classroom activities

research discuss create

Ground Rules
The Black Album contains some strong material. We suggest you set some ground rules when discussing it in class. These should be negotiated and arise from students’ suggestions but could include:
- What's said in the room stays in the room;
- Don’t ask direct personal questions of one another;
- Talk about the characters in the play, rather than real people

Religion and Politics
Split into two groups. One group should explore and research the ways in which different faith groups recruit new members, e.g. word of mouth, missionary work, advertising. The other group should do the same but choose a political party or single issue political group. When each group feeds back, compare findings. Are some methods more effective than others? Are there any methods which the group feel are inappropriate? How does Riaz seek to influence the young people around him?

Censorship
In groups research different periods of history when writing has been censored. Explore why governments choose to silence writers. Feed back your findings. Discuss: is censorship ever justified?

The Culture of 1989
Research an aspect of 1989: for example fashion, music, or politics, and create a mood board of your findings.

Coming of Age
Research other texts which are ‘coming of age’ stories, typically following a character on a transition from adolescence to adulthood. What other books, plays or screenplays fit into this category? How do they compare in structure and content to The Black Album?

Identity
Riaz: What do our people really have in their lives...
They have lost themselves.
Shahid: We've certainly lost something
Discuss this quotation in the context of the play. How many different choices of identity do the characters have?

Video
Use the projections you see in the production as a stimulus to create a video about your area and the identity of the people who live there.
## Write a review

### Worksheet
Write your review as soon as possible after you see the show. You can make notes in the interval, but don’t write notes during the performance: it’s distracting to other people and you might miss something important while you’re looking down at your pad. Also, the actors can see you, and they want to know that you are watching them.

### Here are some questions to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did you notice when you first came into the theatre?</th>
<th>How was the set used? What was the effect of the lighting and projection on the set?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did the actors establish their characters? Think about facial expression, movement, tone of voice.</td>
<td>How did lighting and sound support the story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the costumes help to define each character?</td>
<td>How was comedy used in the play? How did comedy affect the way you think about and respond to the issues in the story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did actors who were playing several roles show their change of character?</td>
<td>What was the impact of the closing sequence? Can you describe the effect of the music and choreography?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the actors interact with each other and with the audience?</td>
<td>What did the play make you feel? What did it make you think about? What questions did it make you want to ask?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further resources

Please note: The National Theatre and Tara Arts take no responsibility for the content of external websites and publications. All web and paper publications listed here have been selected for their relevance to the play.

Books

Kureishi, Hanif:
The Black Album with My Son the Fanatic: A Novel and a Short Story (to be released August 2009)
The Black Album (adapted for the stage, July 2009)
The Buddha of Suburbia (first published 1990, re-printed 2009).

Rushdie, Salman:
The Satanic Verses (first published 1988, reprinted 2008)

Music

Prince albums
Lovesexy
Purple Rain
The Black Album

Websites

www.nationaltheatre.org.uk

www.tara-arts.com

www.internationalpen.org.uk
an international organisation of writers who defend freedom of expression

www.theatrestudy.com
theatre education packs
Workshop

*The Black Album*

interactive learning opportunities

A 90 minute ‘Page to Stage’ workshop led by Jatinder Verma (Artistic Director of Tara Arts and director of *The Black Album*). The workshop will engage students in the active exploration and challenges of adapting Hanif Kureishi's novel for the stage. Workshop suitable for school classes aged 14 +

for more information contact Tara Arts on 020 8333 4457

Many of the theatres on the tour have programmed a Post or Pre-show discussion with the Director and Cast contact the local theatre directly for information on dates and times

14 Jul-09 to 7-Oct-09
National Theatre, Cottesloe
[www.nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk)
Box Office 020 7452 3000

20-Oct-09 to 24-Oct-09
West Yorkshire Playhouse, Courtyard Theatre
[www.wyp.org.uk](http://www.wyp.org.uk)
Box Office: 0113 213 7700

27-Oct-09 to 31-Oct-09
Liverpool Playhouse
[www.everymanplayhouse.com](http://www.everymanplayhouse.com)
Box Office: 0151 709 4776

10-Nov-09 to 14-Nov-09
Oxford Playhouse
[www.oxfordplayhouse.com](http://www.oxfordplayhouse.com)
Box Office: 01865 305305

17-Nov-09 to 21-Nov-09
Warwick Arts Centre
[www.warwickartscentre.co.uk](http://www.warwickartscentre.co.uk)
Box Office: 024 7652 4524

24-Nov-09 to 27-Nov-09
Bath Theatre Royal
[www.theatreroyal.org.uk](http://www.theatreroyal.org.uk)
Box Office: 01225 448844