

As teachers of English at Harrow High, we want our learners to be critical thinkers and readers who are equipped with the knowledge and skills with which to make their own choices and decisions throughout their lives and who are compassionate, conscientious and creative. We want our learners to be effective communicators and we believe that mastery of the written and spoken word is fundamental to ensuring our learners have every opportunity to succeed in life.

Subject: English Year 8 Term One – Small Island

S Reading Skills:

- k** • How to comment on modern drama.
- i** • Dramatic conventions – stage directions, Acts and Scenes – are crucial structural conventions.
- l** • How to analyse the structure of a play.
- l** • How to evaluate the language characters use.

Language analysis – Learners will be able to retrieve explicit information from a fiction text and make developed inferences about character. Learners will be able to identify specific words and phrases used by a writer to describe a character and explain the effects of these choices on the reader. Learners will be able to use embedded quotes and subject terminology in their analysis.

Writing Skills

Writing – This unit will help students to build English disciplinary knowledge alongside procedural knowledge about how to write academically and analytically about the play texts, including constructing a thesis.

K Reading

n Learners will need to know:

- w** • Andrea Levy came to writing late: she started reading seriously when she was 23.
- i** • Levy proudly writes about the experience of life as a black British woman. Her other work includes the novels 'Fruit of the Lemon' and 'The Long Song', the latter of which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.
- d** • 'Small Island' is probably her most well-known novel, winning the Whitbread Book of the Year Award, Orange Prize, and Commonwealth Writers' Prize.
- e** • Levy and Edmondson began working on the play adaptation of 'Small Island' before she died in 2019.
- e** • As a British colony, 1920s Jamaican society – especially the 'high' society of Hortense's circle – has remnants of Englishness.
- Throughout the 1920s and 30s, Jamaica experienced political turmoil: Bustamante was a Jamaican politician and labour leader who championed the plight of the working classes in Jamaica, and challenged colonial rule. This social unrest acts as an inciting incident for the Jamaican characters in the play.
- Dialect plays an important role in the play. Hortense's Standard English is not enough to secure her a teaching job in England, whilst Gilbert's patois initially repels, and ultimately endears, Hortense. Other prominent writers (John Agard, Sam Selvon, Grace Nichols) similarly use patois to explore complex national, multicultural identities.
- The play toys with lots of theatrical convention, namely,
 - *Epic theatre*: where characters go on vast journeys – both literal and figurative
 - *Brechtian theatre*: the play makes use of direct address, tableau, and seamless merges scenes, reality, and memory
 - *Aristotle's Poetics*: rather than conform to Aristotle's unities (time, place, action), 'Small Island' spans generations, nations, and multiple characters
- Although Levy offers a message of hope, the challenges faced by Caribbean immigrants continue today: in 2021, the Windrush compensation scheme had only issued compensation to 5% of Windrush victims.
- Thus, from a literary perspective, Levy follows in the footsteps of other social commentators in the curriculum (Dickens, Orwell, Bronte): she sheds a light on under-represented narratives to draw attention to social inequalities.

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In this unit students are reminded of the importance of social and historical context when reading and interpreting texts. Learners study *Small Island* a play written by Andrea Levy who was a British Caribbean writer. She commissioned the playwright Helen Edmundson to adapt the novel *Small Island* into a play. Learners are taught how to comment on modern drama and will explore a range of dramatic conventions like stage directions, acts and scenes, how to analyse the structure of a play and how to evaluate the language characters use. They will explore a range of themes like ambition, adversity, political influence, prejudice, classism and learn how relate them to specific events and characters from their study of the play.