MARTYR
TEACHER RESOURCE PACK
FOR TEACHERS WORKING WITH STUDENTS IN YEAR 10+
How Far Will You Go For What You Believe?

Benjamin won’t do swimming at school. His mum thinks he’s on drugs or has body issues. But Benjamin has found God and mixed-sex swimming lessons offend him.

Fundamentalism and tolerance clash in this funny, provocative play by leading German playwright, Marius von Mayenburg. Martyr considers how far we should go in accommodating another’s faith, and when we should take a stand for our own opposing beliefs.

This topical production follows Actors Touring Company’s highly acclaimed The Events, seen at the Young Vic last year.

This show contains some strong language and nudity.
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Welcome to the Unicorn’s teacher resources for *Martyr* by Marius Von Mayenburg.

*Martyr* is a co-production between the Unicorn Theatre and Actors Touring Company (ATC), directed by ATC’s Artistic Director, Ramin Gray.

This new play by German playwright Marius Von Mayenburg looks at religious fundamentalism. It explores what happens when Benjamin, a young man in school, starts to live his life by the word of the Bible. The play shows how a selective and literal reading of the Bible leads not to a religion based on compassion, tolerance and forgiveness, but a rigid, unbending faith where dissenting voices are the enemy and must be eradicated.

Written in response to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the attack by extremists on both Islam and Western liberal democracies, the play examines the way in which any doctrine can be distorted to become an unforgiving, intolerant and ultimately violent framework for how to live.

Benjamin isn’t the only character in the play who embodies extremism; Miss White, his Biology and PSHE teacher represents a liberal, secular perspective. As the story unfolds she attempts to take Benjamin on and becomes obsessive about challenging his views with her own beliefs in reason and science. The play asks us to consider who is a fundamentalist and who is a martyr to which cause?

*Martyr* tackles these complex and challenging ideas in this funny, intelligent and thought-provoking play.

Ramin Gray on Marius von Mayenburg: *A beautiful thing that Marius says about his writing is ‘I think that my plays are strategies to activate the spectator’. That’s something I’ve quoted a million times and I use it in all my work. I think that’s what really good plays do; they are simply strategies to make the spectator active because the play’s really happening in the audience, in the auditorium, in the heads and the hearts of the people in the room.*

These teacher resources provide context for the play, an insight into the writer and director’s process and practical ideas for approaching and responding to the play before and after a visit.
The play examines the complicated relationship between radical religion and a contemporary multifaith society and will challenge students to question their own opinions about these pressing social, political and cultural issues. By giving students the opportunity to explore the decisions and actions of characters at key moments, we encourage them to find a connection to their own thoughts and feelings on these important and sensitive matters.

ACCOMPANYING TEACHER CPD – WED 16 SEP 4.30–7PM

CPD is FREE for teachers and is a great opportunity to find out more about the production and to gain practical experience of the accompanying scheme of work before running it with students.

‘An extremely useful and thought-provoking session. Everything was very engaging, clear and easy to adapt for various year groups and abilities.’ Drama teacher, 2015

To book your place on the CPD session, please email schools@unicorntheatre.com
The protagonist in *Martyr* is a Christian fundamentalist, and globally there are many examples of how Christian doctrine can be manipulated and manifested as hate, intolerance and violence, particularly in relation to views on sexual permissiveness, homosexuality and abortion.

> ‘I found (and still find) the way people in Western Europe proudly present our society as based on ‘Christian values’ completely hypocritical. They don’t seem to know much about the values as proclaimed by the book that this religion is based on. I wanted to show that you can take the Bible and make it the source of an extremist ideology that deeply contradicts our democratic values.’
> Marius Von Mayenburg (playwright)

In Britain today, the idea of religious fundamentalism is most commonly associated with Islam, owing to the rising profile of and threat from ISIS. Indeed, the playwright was first inspired to explore the idea of fundamentalism following Al-Qaeda’s 9/11 terrorist attack.

The attack on Charlie Hebdo in France earlier this year highlighted the difficulties of reconciling a secular state with religious identity, as the cartoonists took a stand for freedom of speech and the right to offend those with a religious belief. While the immediate outpouring of support to those ‘Martyrs’ to free speech may have been encouraging to France’s liberal majority, it proved to further alienate many French Muslims who despite condemning the attack, had been deeply offended by the magazine’s portrayal of The Prophet Muhammad. There are reports of Muslims who have always felt at home in France, now considering leaving their country of birth (reported on the BBC’s programme *A Nation Divided? The Charlie Hebdo Aftermath*).

Meanwhile there are young people in Britain who feel more affinity with the building of the Caliphate in Syria than they do with the building of a multifaith, multicultural Britain, with some young people leaving to join ISIS.

Many teachers are questioning how best to respond to the government’s Prevent strategy and approach the promotion of British values with their students. For schools like Bethnal Green Academy, staff are dealing with the issues head on as they respond to the reality of some of their students travelling to join the fight for the Caliphate. In other schools, where there isn’t an immediate need to address these issues explicitly, there may be a level of uncertainty about where to begin. There is a real need to find ways to explore questions of fundamentalism within our multicultural, multifaith society in a way that doesn’t make Muslim children and young people feel more alienated, more isolated, but a part of the conversation and of the solution. Being able to look at a fictional and often very funny scenario takes these questions out of the immediacy of current concerns and into an imagined and absurd context that will make us laugh and question the values we live our lives by.
BELIEF

‘Martyr creates a space where we can confront one of the most pressing issues of our time: how should secular society deal with the challenge from extremism?’

Ramin Gray in the introduction to the Martyr play text.

Helping students to reflect on questions of faith, belief and secularism would provide useful context for watching the play Martyr. While the main protagonist, Benjamin, professes to be a committed Christian, this play is not mainly concerned with the place of religion in someone's life. We do not get insight into how and why he becomes committed to the teachings of the bible, what we see is someone who is highly selective with those teachings and uses them to justify racist, misogynist and homophobic words and deeds, and ultimately to justify violence against non-believers. The other characters in the play are forced to deal with someone who is rigid and unbending in the application of his faith.

‘Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be those of his own household.’

Benjamin quoting Matthew 10:34-36

However there are moments in the play which hint at why Benjamin might have become so extreme in his beliefs, as well as moments when both he and other characters attempt to reach or to feel the presence of God. Over 75% of people worldwide believe in a God and for most believers God is what gives their life meaning and which gives them the framework to lead a good, moral life. Thinking about the place of God in people's lives and how different people interpret and express their knowledge of God could be useful preparation.

GOD AND SCIENCE

For someone with belief their feeling and experience of God is proof of God's existence. For an atheist the absence of scientific proof of God is crucial. Many atheists argue that the development of scientific knowledge has made the need for a higher being irrelevant; that God and religion came about as a way of explaining natural phenomena which earlier humans did not yet understand.

‘….there would be no such churches in the first place if humanity had not been afraid of the weather, the dark, the plague, the eclipse, and all manner of other things now easily explicable.’

Christopher Hitchens in his book God is not Great (p.65)

Richard Dawkins who wrote The God Delusion and Christopher Hitchens have both argued passionately about the harm that religion and a belief in the supernatural have resulted in for humanity; in particular citing the wars which have been fought throughout history in the name of Religion. Both have been described as fundamentalist atheists and of being intolerant. Hitchens likens humans to children in the pre-scientific age and argues that in the 21st Century we should have matured:

‘One must state it plainly. Religion comes from a period of human prehistory where nobody – not even the mighty Democritus who concluded that all matter was made from atoms – had the smallest idea what was going on. It comes from the bawling and fearful infancy of our species, and is a babyish attempt to meet our inescapable demand for knowledge (as well as for comfort, reassurance and other infantile needs).’ (p.64)
This echoes the way in which Biology teacher, Erica White, argues in the play:

‘Can we bear not knowing everything, or do we have to fill this vacuum with a fairytale like children who are afraid of the dark? And does it really have to be something someone came up with over two thousand years ago? Just because they’re such beautiful, familiar images? What did God do before creation? Sleep? Travel? And who created God? Does it say that in the Bible? No.

Understanding the extremist mind has a fresh urgency in the contemporary world. In the recent book *Isis: The State of Terror* the writers describe the extremists need for simple explanations for things and the difficulty with complexity.

> What seems to be most appealing about violent fundamentalist groups – whatever combination of reasons an individual may cite for joining – is the simplification of life and thought. Good and evil are brought out in stark relief. Life is transformed through action. Martyrdom – the supreme act of heroism and worship – provides the ultimate relief from life’s dilemmas, especially for individuals who feel deeply alienated and confused, humiliated, or desperate.

Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger.

The play ultimately asks the questions: Who is the extremist, the martyr? Is it Benjamin with his unswerving trust in God and the Bible, or Miss White and her absolute certainties?
'The play is funny and that’s really useful, because if you’re dealing with a tricky, difficult or serious political subject, the last thing you want to do is hit the audience over the head with it or make them feel that this is an important play - thankfully Marius doesn’t do that. Partly the rhythm of the play is very fast; partly the characters are a little bit out of control. The teachers are really not very good at dealing with Benjamin, and I think that is great fun because we all naturally look up to teachers and we imagine that they are full of authority and wisdom and they know what to do, and it is a pleasure to see them mess it up in quite a big way.' Ramin Gray, director

Benjamin has found God and starts living his life according to the Bible. For him it is not a text which explains human’s experience of God, but the absolute word of God with clear directions for how to live.

First Benjamin makes a stand on swimming, complaining that the exposure of flesh in the mixed swimming lessons hurts his religious feelings. He insists that the school should adopt a more modest swimming costume policy for students and when the head teacher complies, Benjamin becomes very unpopular amongst his peers.

His mother and teachers don’t know how to handle his new found religious zeal. Faced with Benjamin’s absolute certainty and immovability, they try to find a compromise using reason and tolerance but Benjamin refuses to change and increasingly sees the world - and those around him - as hypocritical and immoral.

Benjamin increasingly selects quotes that justify his attack on liberal values including sexuality and homosexuality, women’s rights, his mother’s behaviour as a single parent, the institution of the church, evolution and Judaism. As his behaviour becomes more extreme, the people around him struggle to know how to react to the zealot in their midst.

However, there are two young people who respond differently. Firstly George - disabled and on the fringes of his peer group, teased, and possibly bullied - is attracted to Benjamin. Benjamin attempts to convert George and enlist him in the fight against the enemy. George is prepared to go so far, but when he refuses to enact Benjamin’s ultimate attack on the enemy, Benjamin turns on him.

Lydia is a young woman who is relaxed and confident in her sexuality. She is intrigued by Benjamin and the changes in his behaviour and the passion he displays.

The exploration of passionate doctrinaire belief systems comes to a head in Benjamin’s relationship with his biology teacher, Miss White. When faced with Benjamin’s rigidity, Miss White finds it impossible to accept his behaviour. ‘Something hurt him and now he’s hitting back.....I’m not going to watch, I’m going to take him to task.’ She becomes obsessed with challenging his views and proving the incontrovertible truth of what she, as a scientist, knows to be true.

The play shows what happens when these two people come into conflict, both certain in their claim for the truth and both willing to sacrifice themselves for their truth.
Before taking the post of Artistic Director at Actors Touring Company (ATC), Ramin Gray was International Associate, then Associate Director at the Royal Court Theatre where he directed many world and British premieres. These included Marius von Mayenburg’s The Ugly One and The Stone, Simon Stephens’ Motortown, and Mark Ravenhill’s Over There. He has also directed at the RSC, Out of Joint, The Gate and in many theatres across Europe.

As Artistic Director of ATC, Ramin’s work has included the multi-award winning The Events by David Greig, which recently played at the New York Theatre Workshop having premiered at the Traverse Theatre and played two sell out runs at the Young Vic.

Below is an edited transcript of an interview with Ramin, which was filmed at the Unicorn Theatre in March 2015. Here he talks about his reasons for wanting to direct Martyr and his initial thoughts and feelings about the piece five months before going into rehearsal. As he says towards the end of the interview: ‘I might have got this all wrong of course. I haven’t directed the play yet, so I’m just talking, and this is months before we go into rehearsal. I’ll get the actors in the room and we’ll read the play, we’ll have lots of discussions and I might be completely wrong, but the fruits of our labours will be on the Unicorn stage and that’s the time for you to come and see what you think.’

Q: Tell us about the play.

A: It is a very simple story set in and around a school, the main character is a young man called Benjamin, who’s probably 16 or 17. It’s revealed quite early on in the play that he has a very strong religious belief and this belief is so strong that it means that he comes into conflict with a lot of the things that the school is asking him to do.

We understand through the play that it is really hard to find a way to accept someone with very powerful religious feelings in the modern world; how we live in a secular liberal society and how we integrate, or accommodate people with feelings and thoughts that might be quite different to that.
The Biology teacher, Miss White, decides to take on this boy at his own game and she becomes completely obsessed about defeating his thoughts and his politics, and she goes really far down the line of standing up for her beliefs. She becomes obsessed with defeating this ideology and she becomes obsessed with defending her position; the secular, liberal position.

She sacrifices her relationship, she is threatened with dismissal and she does something that is so extreme that it raises the question in my mind and I hope in the audiences’ minds: how far are we prepared to go to defend or to stand up for the things we believe in?

I think what is interesting, is that the play asks the audience to see what side they’re on and where their sympathies lie, and also to appreciate a very big issue that we should all think about: how and on what basis are we all going to live together?

Q: Why do the play now?

A: We do live, especially in London, in an extremely diverse society and there are people of all sorts of different ethnicities and religions living here. As we know, earlier this year there were the three girls from Bethnal Green Academy who went off to fight for ISIS - and that was a huge story. Those girls were obviously very attracted to Islamic fundamentalism to the extent that they felt they couldn’t live in this society anymore and they have gone off to find a new society elsewhere. And many of the conflicts that have happened in England have been around this issue - the basis on which we live together. The issue of how we as a society live together. I think theatre should be useful as well as entertaining and thought-provoking. I think ‘useful’ is quite a good word: I think that coming together in one space, and the buzz that you get afterwards when people are talking about it, is one of the best things we can do to come to some kind of agreement, some consensus in our social and political lives. I really like this play for its practical utility. That’s a word I’ve never used for a play; I think it has a lot of utility this play.

I know that Marius started thinking about the play in the wake of 9/11. It was the clearest point where people became aware of a threat from fundamentalist Islam. I also know that many playwrights have wanted to write about the subject and many playwrights have said in private to me that they don’t think it is worth their lives writing about this subject.

What is clever about what Marius has done is that the word Muslim or Islam is not mentioned in the play at all. So in some sense there is nothing provocative here. He’s using another religion, which just happens to be Christianity and that can be the template if you like, but really you can put any religion into it. Because the problem is if you base your society on religious law, how does that match up with many of the rights, the freedoms, the moralities that have evolved in our modern societies?

Because religious law goes back a very, very long time, there may be stuff that we have to learn from their teachings, but equally there is much that is simply inapplicable or inappropriate to where we are now. And I think that’s what the play allows us to think about by choosing a religion that’s not particularly inflammatory in Great Britain today.

Q: Why bring the play to the Unicorn?

A: The company I run is called the Actors Touring Company, and the clue is in the name. We’re vagabonds, we’re always on the road and we have to co-produce our shows, we have to make them with theatres. When I came to make this play it took me quite a long time to realise that three of the main characters are teenagers and that it’s set in and around schools.
Then I remembered Purni Morell, who runs the Unicorn, and I thought she is a really bright woman who will appreciate this play, and wouldn’t it be exciting for us, a company who has only ever really done ‘adult work’ to come to the Unicorn. Also, working here would give us immediate access to an audience of younger people and I’m really excited to see school groups and audiences come in and share the experience of this play. This is a thing that in other theatres might be more tokenistic, whereas at the Unicorn it’s the central part of what you do. For us it’s a big step and a really exciting one.

If what we want is a society where everyone participates on an equal footing, then you do want your ideal audience to have everyone in it, from teenagers to pensioners, especially when a play is dealing with the consensus of how we all live together.

Q: Can you talk about the staging of the play?

A: The play is divided into 27 scenes and they flip between all sorts of locations, such as the headteacher’s office, outside by a river, in a kitchen, all sorts of settings. When you have so many scenes I think you are just making problems for yourself if you try to replicate those scenes in a realistic, naturalistic kind of way. Marius does a beautiful thing with his writing; from the writing it becomes very clear where we are. This is a very old trick which Shakespeare uses when he says ‘oh so this is the Forest of Arden’, and we think brilliant, we don’t need to build a forest set. In the same way the play is really good at painting where it is.

We are going to go for something very simple, I’m not going to say what that is, but there will be, I hope, the spectacle of actors engaged in building something. I’m committed to the idea that the audience really engage with the actors and that the actors make the audience do quite a lot of the work. It is also part of a green thing, which means that when we go on tour we don’t have to cart a load of set around with us. We’ve got a little policy in our company which is; ‘people not stuff’. So we try to build as little as possible but employ as many people as possible.

Another beautiful thing that Marius says about his writing is ‘I think that my plays are strategies to activate the spectator’. That’s something I’ve quoted a million times and I use it in all my work. I think that’s what really good plays do - they are simply strategies to make the spectator active, because the play’s really happening in the audience, in the auditorium, in the heads and the hearts of the people in the room. It’s not really happening in a room in a school, so we don’t need to build all that stuff, but we need to activate the audience’s engagement.

Q: How do you think the humour in the play will work?

A: The play is funny and that’s really useful. Because if you’re dealing with a tricky, or difficult, or serious political subject then the last thing you want to do is hit the audience over the head with it or make them feel that this is an important play and thankfully Marius doesn’t do that. Partly the rhythm of the play is very fast; partly the characters are a little bit out of control. The teachers are really not very good at dealing with this kid, and I think that is great fun because we all naturally look up to teachers and imagine that they are full of authority and wisdom so it is a pleasure to see them mess it up in quite a big way.

There are lots of slightly shocking moments in the play, moments when you think ‘Oh is that person really doing that? Are they really saying that?’. Those are moments when audiences often laugh, partly as a sort of pleasure and there’s also a thrill when someone does something that you think is wrong. That’s one of the great reasons for going to the theatre; seeing people do bad shit.
Q: What do you want people to take away from seeing the production?

A: My thoughts have changed the more I’ve worked on it, I used to think ‘Oh the religious fundamentalist character is a misguided youth’ and I think that is clear, but what equally happens in the play is... actually, I don’t want to give too much away... but I think the play needs to be more finely balanced, more nuanced.

There is a role for religion in society. I am a profound atheist myself, but I do believe in theatre - it’s sort of my religion and by extension, I can see what religion can do. There is a brilliant thing that Jesus Christ says when his followers ask him what to do about paying tax to the Romans. Jesus says ‘render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and render unto the Lord what is the Lord’s’. In other words, pay your money to the Roman state (which is not a Christian state) but give your spiritual devotion, your Christian devotion, to God. He said there’s the state and there’s religion and they are two separate things. Because the state is not a Christian state, it’s a Roman state, and that is fantastic because it opens up an area where you can have two things: you can have churches and you can have parliamentary democracy. The problem with (fundamentalist) Islam is that it can’t envisage that at the moment; so ISIS is a state, it’s an Islamic state.

I don’t think Marius is attacking Christianity. Christianity is 2000 years old and right now the Muslims are in the year 1392. If you look at where the Christians were in 1392 it is where the Muslims are right now. What is happening in the Middle East is the hundred years war, the wars of religion.

Like any good play Martyr asks the question ‘where do you draw the line?’ And everyone will draw the line somewhere different. Everyone has a different limit and it is just interesting to find out where different people’s limits are. And that’s what the play offers us, a whole range of people drawing their lines in different places.

Q: Can you talk about the schools setting and the character of the headmaster?

A: A school is a great image for society because it has a hierarchy. In one sense the pupils are citizens, the teachers are MPs and politicians, and the headmaster is the king or the president.

In this play there are four visits to the headmaster’s office; every time there is a problem it gets to the point where the teachers have to take it to the headmaster, and we’ve all experienced that haven’t we? It strikes fear into you when the teacher says ‘right you’re going to the headteacher’s office’ and you get dragged down the corridor by the wrist.

What happens in this play is that the headteacher is a very jovial character, he’s quite fly, he’s quite relaxed, he doesn’t really enforce the boundaries in the way we expect him to and he’s remarkably poor at taking control. And as a result of his wavering, his lack of decision-making, he doesn’t really take any preventative steps and things escalate. I think that is very interesting because in the liberal world what we seek, often, is a degree of compromise where we can talk about things easily and openly. That becomes a problem and the Biology teacher becomes much more rigid and tries to push things in an unbending manner, so the contrast between the headmaster’s approach and the biology teacher’s approach becomes very instructive. They’re models for us in terms of how we might respond and react.

I might have got this all wrong of course. I haven’t directed the play yet, so I’m just talking and this is months before we go into rehearsal. I’ll get the actors in the room and we’ll read the play, we’ll have lots of discussions - and I might be completely wrong - but the fruits of our labours will be on the Unicorn stage and that’s the time for you to come and see what you think.
Q: Why did you write Martyr?

A: The play was a reaction to an ongoing debate about Islamic fundamentalism in Germany. I found the way people quoted lines from the Quran without any deeper knowledge of the context annoying. And I found (and still find) the way people in Western Europe proudly present our society as based on “Christian values” completely hypocritical. They don’t seem know much about the values as proclaimed by the book this religion is based on. I wanted to show that you can take the Bible and make it the source of an extremist ideology that deeply contradicts our democratic values.

Q: Why did you make your protagonist Christian?

A: I wanted to talk about religious fundamentalism in general. Therefore I needed to show things that religions have in common once they are used as an ideology to attack other people. Once I started reading the Bible I realised it wasn’t difficult at all to find the spots that can be used. The book is full of it.

Q: How do you feel your play speaks to the challenges of a multifaith, multicultural society?

A: I think it’s important to make some corrections to our Christian self-esteem and our sense of moral superiority. In most European countries there’s a white majority who still believe that Christian values are the moral foundation of our societies. And they ignore that ‘Christian values’ can be anything you want to draw from the Bible. And even if you say, alright let’s pretend our values are Christian - what happened for example to the idea of love of one’s neighbour? Don’t we have to admit instead that our societies are much more than anything else deeply rooted in the values of the market?

One topic of the play is the discussion about whether religion is private or public. Whether society is providing a framework in which everyone can do whatever they like as long as it doesn’t harm anyone else. One of these things being religion; a private occupation or passion that no one needs to know about because it’s taking place between the individual and his or her god. Or whether religion should be something bigger than this framework. Whether this framework should be framed according to the rules of a certain religion, which almost automatically excludes the possibility of a multifaith society. This discussion - whether religion is a private or a public thing - is very complicated. Most people I know who are religious would argue that religion by its nature is something public. Most atheistic people would say that they wouldn’t want to be part of that public.
Q: The issues raised within the play resonate across faiths, exploring the rigidity of fixed belief systems but do you worry that people will see the play as antagonistic to all religion and to Christianity in particular?

A: I’m tempted to say not at all, I’m not attacking religion, if the play is an attack on religion then religion is attacking itself. But to be honest, my doubts about religion couldn’t be any deeper. I’m happy to share them.

Q: Benjamin takes highly selected readings from the Bible and takes the teachings literally, he sees the Bible as the word of God. For him there is no space for interpretation and debate around intended meaning.

A: That’s the way fundamentalism works: once you admit that there is space for interpretation and debate you also admit that the book is literature. And as literature it must be understood within the parameters of history and textual criticism. It is no longer a law that stands and speaks for itself.

Q: The play exposes the misogyny that a literal reading of the Bible can lead to. Do you think that hearing these attitudes expressed by Benjamin suggests that extremism is an aberration, a distortion of the Bible, or do you believe that Christianity is essentially misogynist?

A: Both. I don’t want to talk about Christianity in general even though it is tempting to judge Christianity by the Bible. But the Bible is definitely a misogynist, homophobic and even anti-semitic book, I you don’t switch off your brain when reading certain paragraphs. But of course I didn’t want to write a play about the Bible. I’m far more interested in asking a question about our own traditions and values, and in producing some doubts about our favourite ideas about ourselves. It is so much more interesting to discover the strangling within ourselves than to point the finger at others.

Q: Do you think there is something in (religious) fundamentalism which makes it particularly attractive to adolescents?

A: As you grow up and become an adult your life gets more and more complicated. Religious fundamentalism is a way to keep it simple. It offers simple solutions to complicated problems. It allows you to stay intellectually on a child’s level. And it allows young men who have an extremely high levels of testosterone to act out their aggression.

Q: The Unicorn is a theatre for young audiences. How do you think the play might speak to an audience made up of young people around the age of Benjamin?

A: I’ve seen the play performed for young audiences and I was glad to see that the world that the play is talking about is drawing them into the story: school and family. They got the sense of humour, some of them couldn’t stop laughing, which I found almost worrying at times. It seemed like the play almost had too much to do with their own lives. But it was obvious that a young audience doesn’t want to be spared any unpleasant part of the story. If you take them seriously they will respond in a serious way. That’s also what I remember from my first experiences as a child in theatre: I always wanted to see the real stuff no matter how harsh it was.
Q: The play is funny and provocative, the humour often springing from the adult’s inability to deal with the intransigent young man and the mundane setting of school and home life. Can you talk a little bit about how the comedy works in the production?

A: I think we always laugh in theatre when people do or say inadequate things, if people are extremely rude for example. It opens doors and makes us see things behind the surface and we enjoy these moments of insight. I think we also enjoy it when people do or say things on stage that we always wanted to do or say ourselves but never dared to. So we cheer characters on who break the rules for us.

Q: How would you like your audience to leave the theatre at the end of a performance?

A: Thinking. With some new questions and doubts in their heads.

Q: The play has been performed in Russia and France already, how much has the specific context of these performances changed the production for you?

A: Unfortunately I haven’t seen most of the productions. But I’m glad that the play has been performed and discussed in different countries with different theatrical and political contexts.

Q: You have said in interview that because of your emphasis on people and plot your plays are sometimes considered ‘old-fashioned’ in Germany, but this is not a straightforward naturalistic play. What would you say to young Theatre Studies’ students about the way in which the play is structured and your approach to characterisation?

A: Actually I can’t really say much about this. The process of writing has a lot to do with the actors I’m writing for. I’m writing the kind of things that I want to see as a spectator and that I like to rehearse as a director. My last four or five plays I wrote in this way. I already knew who would play which part in it and I knew that I would direct the first production. This means that I don’t think much about a market in which the play needs to compete. I simply write down all the things that I need to make a production and tell the story I want to tell. Of course there is a more elaborate answer to your question, but that would take too much time and space.
THE CAST

Daniel O’Keefe as Benjamin Sinclair (pupil)

Flaminia Cinque as Ingrid Sinclair (Benjamin’s mother)

Mark Lockyer as Willy Belford (Headmaster)

Brian Lonsdale as Marcus Dixon (History, PE)

Natalie Radmall-Quirke as Erica White (Biology & Chemistry)

Kriss Dosanjh as Vicar Dexter Menrath (RS)

Jessye Romeo as Lydia Weber (pupil)

Farshid Rokey as George Hansen (pupil)
ACTORS TOURING COMPANY MANIFESTO 2015–2018

Actors Touring Company makes international, contemporary theatre that travels.

- We’ll make productions that activate and entertain the audience while asking questions of the world around us.
- We’ll work with writers of the highest calibre, placing them at the heart of our process to challenge perceptions and create fresh insight.
- We’ll question what theatre is and could be, developing our art form through openness, invention and curiosity.
- We’ll seek out new ideas, new artists and new international perspectives to enrich our own artistic development.
- We’ll focus on actors so their words and actions empower the imagination, expanding the sense of possibility for all.
- We’ll employ a lean physical aesthetic supporting our aspiration to minimize environmental impact while focusing our resources on people.
- We’ll tour extensively in the UK and overseas, taking work to the broadest possible audience.
- We’ll develop the sector by offering opportunity to theatre practitioners, sustaining touring into the future.

ABOUT THE UNICORN:

The Unicorn is the UK’s leading professional theatre for young audiences, empowering them to explore the world – on their own terms – through theatre that is honest, refreshing and international in outlook. Firmly on the map as a leading producing theatre, the Unicorn has been described in the UK as having ‘the right to claim a place as one of our leading new-writing theatres’ by Lyn Gardner of The Guardian and in 2014 received the prestigious Peter Brook Empty Space Award.

The Unicorn Theatre was founded by Caryl Jenner in 1947 with a commitment to giving children a valuable and often first ever experience of quality theatre, and a philosophy that ‘the best of theatre for children should be judged on the same high standards of writing, directing, acting and design as the best of adult theatre.’ Today, the Unicorn is the national home of theatre for children and young people and is an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation.
INTRODUCTION

These activities have been developed to give teachers ideas to help prepare and follow up from a visit to Martyr at the Unicorn Theatre.

There are three Drama sequences that are designed to be flexible enough for teachers to use in their planning with students across Key Stages 4 and 5 and that could be extended to create full schemes of work.

There is also one shorter sequence which is designed to be used in a classroom rather than a Drama space and give students in R.E, PSHE or English lessons the opportunity to explore some of the key issues in the play.

Activities will give students the opportunity to:

• **EXPLORE** the form and content of the play, in order to get more out of their experience as an audience.
• **RESPOND** to characters, themes and ideas in the play, considering the drama medium and the elements of Drama.
• **PERFORM** their own practical responses to key ideas, themes and characters in the play.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

**MARTYR**: a person who is killed, or is prepared to die, for their religious (or other) beliefs.

**TOLERANCE**: The ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with.

**INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY**: The state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one’s behaviour or political views.

**FREEDOM OF SPEECH**: The right to express any opinions without censorship or restraint.

**EMPATHY**: The ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

**INTUITIVE**: Using or based on what one feels to be true even without conscious reasoning; instinctive.

**RATIONAL**: Based on or in accordance with reason or logic.

**FUNDAMENTALISM**: A form of a religion, especially Islam or Protestant Christianity, that upholds belief in the strict, literal interpretation of scripture.

**IRRECONCILABLE**: Incapable of being brought into harmony or adjustment; incompatible.
SEQUENCE ONE

BENJAMIN

AIMS
To introduce students to the main character in the play, Benjamin, and begin to engage with key
themes, exploring the questions:
• How does the character of Benjamin challenge the other characters in the play?
• How does Benjamin use the Bible within the play?

EXPLORATIVE STRATEGIES
Still image, short scene making, improvisation, listening hand.

1) INTRODUCTION
Explain that you are going to explore the opening moments of the play Martyr before your visit to
the theatre. The play examines what happens when teenager Benjamin stops doing what is expected
of him and the way in which those around him react to his intransigence. The play doesn’t focus on
understanding why he behaves in the way that he does, but how and why the people around him
respond in the way that they do, highlighting the clash between fundamentalism and liberalism.
Create a shared definition of these two positions:

Fundamentalism
• a form of a religion, especially Islam or Protestant Christianity, that upholds belief in the
  strict, literal interpretation of scripture.
• a strict adherence to the basic principles of any subject or discipline.

Liberalism
• a political philosophy or worldview founded on ideas of liberty and equality.

2) STILL IMAGE
Ask students to work in pairs; one playing Benjamin’s mother, the other Benjamin. Give them a little
context about the start of the play:

Benjamin and his mother live together alone. She is divorced and she works nights.

Benjamin has refused to go swimming at school; his mother has been phoned by the school and
knows she is going to have to talk to him when he gets home from school that day.

Ask students to create three still images showing what happens when Benjamin arrives home that
day. These are moments of action before any discussion between Benjamin and his mother takes
place. To do this they will need to decide what kind of relationship they might have and in particular
how the mother is feeling about Benjamin. She could be angry, frustrated, defeated, impatient,
sympathetic etc.

See a few of the pairs’ images and briefly discuss the way students have chosen to show the
relationship between the mother and a son and what this might suggest to us as audience about what
each might want in this situation.
3) SHORT SCENE MAKING

Ask students to use their three images as the beginning of a scene and then to improvise the conversation between the mother and Benjamin. Give students the first script extract below (resource 1) to use to begin their improvised conversation.

MOTHER: Your teacher called.

(Nothing)

Is there something you’d like to tell me?

BENJAMIN: No.

Explain that in their scene Benjamin wants his mother to write him a sick note to excuse him from swimming, but won’t say what the reason is.

The mother wants to get to the bottom of why Benjamin doesn’t want to do swimming.

While students are improvising introduce the listening hand; freeze the whole class and listen in to one or two of the conversations for a couple of minutes.

Now ask students to script a short scene out of the best ideas that came out in their improvisation, using the text from the play and one or two more lines for Benjamin and the mother.

Finally give them the second script extract to incorporate into their scene (resource 1).

BENJAMIN: Put: because of religious reasons.

MOTHER: What?

BENJAMIN: That the swimming lessons hurt my religious feelings. That’s it.

MOTHER: But Benjamin –

BENJAMIN: Then it’s settled once and for all.

MOTHER: Benjamin, you don’t have any religious feelings.

BENJAMIN: How would you know?

Ask the students to rehearse the scene from the beginning, incorporating both sections script extracts and the lines of dialogue that came from their improvisation. Ask students to finish their scene in the way that is consistent with how they have chosen to portray Benjamin and his mother.

4) AT SCHOOL

Explain that, at his next swimming lesson, Benjamin jumps into the pool fully dressed. His mother is called in to school and he is dripping wet at the meeting.

Join pairs into groups of four and give students the third extract, where Benjamin finally explains his actions (resource 1). Ask them to read it aloud together and discuss.
BENJAMIN: I vow before God and the world: I've had it. I've had it with hiding and pretending to be sick when I'm the only one who's healthy.

I put up with it for a long time, although the Lord commands “that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation”, not in a bikini “but, which is proper for women professing godliness” I put up with it, maybe I didn’t notice it, but now I do, I feel it clearly.

Ask groups to create a short scene which shows Benjamin in the teacher’s office where he finally explains his problem with swimming lessons.

With one person as Benjamin, who will read the text form the play, ask other students to play the following characters who are part of this scene:

• Miss White, Benjamin’s Biology, PSHE and guidance (pastoral care) teacher.
• Mr Dixon, the PE teacher
• Benjamin’s mother.

They should each create a one line response to Benjamin’s speech that shows their particular attitude or feelings towards him.

Share the groups’ scenes and discuss:

What affect does Benjamin’s behaviour have on the adults in his life?
How do they respond in the moment to his action and statement?
How might the school respond to his behaviour?
How might his mother respond to his behaviour?
EXTRACT ONE

MOTHER: Your teacher called.

(Nothing.)

Is there something you’d like to tell me?

BENJAMIN: No.

EXTRACT TWO

BENJAMIN: Put: because of religious reasons.

MOTHER: What?

BENJAMIN: That the swimming lessons hurt my religious feelings. That’s it.

MOTHER: But Benjamin –

BENJAMIN: Then it’s settled once and for all.

MOTHER: Benjamin, you don’t have any religious feelings.

BENJAMIN: How would you know?

EXTRACT THREE

BENJAMIN: I vow before God and the world: I’ve had it. I’ve had it with hiding and pretending to be sick when I’m the only one who’s healthy.

I put up with it for a long time, although the Lord commands “that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation”, not in a bikini “but, which is proper for women professing godliness” I put up with it, maybe I didn’t notice it, but now I do, I feel it clearly.
SEQUENCE TWO
BELIEF AND TOLERANCE

AIMS
To explore students’ own feelings and thoughts about the place of personal belief in a multicultural, multifaith society, through an active exploration of the following questions:
• What does it mean to live alongside others who have beliefs and opinions different to our own?
• To what extent can theatre and drama be used to develop empathy and understanding of people with very different life experiences and beliefs to our own?

EXPLORATIVE STRATEGIES
Short scene making, spectrum line, thought tracking, still image, direct address, cross-cutting.

1) INTRODUCTION
Read out the quote from Purni Morell, Artistic Director of the Unicorn Theatre, and explain that this is going to provide a provocation to the work on Martyr.

I have a friend who says there are two problems in this world, and only two: one is how you live with other people; the other is how you live with yourself. What I like about theatre is that it’s the meeting point of those two problems. Purni Morell.

Ask students what they think Purni might mean by this statement.

2) SPECTRUM LINE
Explain that you will read out a series of statements (below) and ask students to place themselves along the spectrum; one end of the room is ‘strongly agree’ with the statement, the other ‘strongly disagree’, or they can position themselves at any point between each end of the room.

For each statement, after students have positioned themselves, ask them to talk a little about the decision they have made and why they feel that way, taking different responses from along the spectrum.

• It is impossible to really understand another human being.
• Drama and theatre help you to ‘step into the shoes’ of someone else and to think as they think.
• Differences make the world a richer place.
• Differences are what cause conflict.
• There are some people I will never be able to understand.
• We are all the same underneath it all.
• I have very strong beliefs which shape who I am.
• It’s important to stand up for what you believe in.
• I would always say what I think and feel, whatever the situation.

Ask students to think of some examples of personal beliefs which people could hold that other people might disagree with, for example ‘eating meat is wrong’ or ‘there is only one god’. Write these up to return to later.
3) STOP/GO – IMAGE MAKING

Play a game of ‘stop/go’. Start by moving around the room finding a common rhythm and an awareness that the group are working together. The aim is for the whole group to stop as one when you call stop and move off as one when you call go.

You may want to develop this further - working for the group to stop and go without you calling out and without any one person leading.

Questions: Were you able to work together as an ensemble? What was necessary for this activity to work well? What were the challenges? How does it feel to be part of a harmonious group? How does it feel when the group is not working well together?

Now introduce group numbers - when you call stop ask them to get into groups of that number and then create a still image set in a location in a school in 2015, using the titles below. These should be quick, instinctive images, so only give the groups between 10-20 seconds to make each one.

- Tolerance
- Equality
- Celebrating differences
- One person stands up for what they believe in
- The majority and the minority
- Spirituality
- Individual freedom
- Agreeing to disagree
- Passionate debate (healthy)
- Passionate debate (unhealthy)
- Irreconcilable difference of opinion

Discuss the idea of a class and a school being a community made up of a vast range of individuals, with each person having different hopes, dreams, passions and beliefs.

Introduce the definition of the fundamental British values which the government have highlighted as underpinning the society we live in, in 2015: democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.

Discuss with students their response to the list and ask what these values mean to them.
  - Are there other values which they would want to add to the list?
  - Do we think these values help us to live alongside people with contrasting views to our own?

4) SHORT SCENE MAKING

In groups of 4, 5 or 6, ask the students to create a short scene set in 2015 in a London school, which shows a situation where there is a difference of opinion between two protagonists, one with a firm belief in God (although that doesn’t have to mean that they are part of an organised religion), the other an atheist.
Firstly discuss with students the key features of a person with a belief in God and an atheist. You may want to use the glossary of terms which relate to belief (resource 2). Now as a whole class gather ideas about what kind of issues might trigger the disagreement. The scenes might take place in a lesson, for example; Philosophy, Biology, Home Economics, PSHE, Science. Or the scene might be in a more informal setting in break times, outside of a classroom. The scenes need to show two people with very different beliefs, but each is shown with integrity and empathy.

In their groups, ask students to begin to devise their scene, starting with the two characters who come into opposition with each other. Then add other characters into the scene; the rest of the characters should express a range of attitudes and responses to the two protagonists.

- Each character should have a minimum of one line and a maximum of two.
- Decide where to set their scene - either as part of a lesson or outside of lesson time.
- Remind students that if they are playing someone with different beliefs to their own they will need to develop a sense of empathy with someone else’s point of view.
- The aim is to show different perspectives and for the characterisation to be truthful rather than caricature.

5) THOUGHT TRACK INTO DIRECT ADDRESS

See a few of the scenes and ask students to hold their final moment in a freeze - thought track this moment. You can probe some characters a little more with questions which deepen the investment in that moment, asking students to speak their character’s inner thoughts. Ask them to give equal weight to each character’s viewpoint and to empathise with their perspective.

Ask students to develop some of the ideas that came up in the thought tracking and to now write their character’s thoughts as a short internal monologue. Try to show a range of perspectives, feelings and thoughts.

Now re-rehearse the scenes, adding in moments where the action is frozen and characters break out to speak their internal monologue to the audience through direct address.

See the groups’ scenes with this addition.

Reflective questions:
- What was the cause of difference and disagreement in the scenes?
- How easy was it to represent all point of view or beliefs equally in your scenes?
- Did your scenes feel truthful? Are these scenarios that you recognise could take place?
- How easy is it to live together with tolerance and respect for different personal beliefs and values?

EXTENSION

Ask each person to write an individual diary entry for their character when they get home. At school their character has to co-exist, get along, tolerate, listen to, and respond to others. This is a chance to express their character’s private thoughts.

You could set this up as automatic writing, where students have to write continuously for one minute. They can then choose one sentence from their writing to underline, which you can then hear from everyone in the class.

You may want to ask students to create a longer piece of performance by bringing some of the different activities together. For example, they could create a physical theatre scene using some of the still images from the stop/go activity, then add this to their scenes, cross-cutting into the direct address and diary entries.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numinous</td>
<td>The feeling of the presence of something greater than you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omnipotent</td>
<td>The belief that God is all powerful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onmi-benevolent</td>
<td>The belief that God is all good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omniscient</td>
<td>The belief that God knows everything that has happened and everything that is going to happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atheism</td>
<td>Believing that God does not exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnosticism</td>
<td>Not being sure whether God exists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free will</td>
<td>The idea that human beings are free to make their own choices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SEQUENCE THREE
EXPLORING MARTYRDOM

The issue of the rise of fundamentalism is deeply troubling to me and one that I am committed to combating, if only through pursuit of theatre, a form that encourages plurality of view, fosters discussion and debate and which is a vital part of the fabric of civic society. Ramin Gray

Martyr (noun)
1: a person who voluntarily suffers death as the penalty of witnessing to and refusing to renounce a religion.
2: a person who sacrifices something of great value and especially life itself for the sake of principle.

AIMS
To explore what we imagine might make someone a martyr, considering the following questions:
- What are the characteristics of someone who is prepared to become a martyr for their beliefs?
- To what extent can we find a connection between martyrs and our own values and experiences?
- How can theatre allow us to empathise and understand people with experience and beliefs very different from our own?
- What makes someone an extremist?

EXPLORATIVE STRATEGIES
Role on the wall, physical action, emotional memory, still image, verbatim theatre.

1) GO IF –
This inclusive game is an accessible warm up which explores who we are, what we share with others and what makes us different.

Sit in a circle with a chair for each student. One person is without a chair and they stand in the middle of the circle. The person in the middle says ‘go if…’ followed by something that is true about themselves. For example ‘Go if you have a pet cat’ or ‘Go if you support Manchester United’.

Anyone who the statement is also true for has to then leave their seat and move across the circle to find another seat. The person who is ‘on’ also tries to sit down while everyone is moving, leaving a new person in the middle, without a chair.

Make sure you stress the following rules: once you’ve left your chair you cannot go back, you should not move to the chair immediately next to you if there is another seat free across the circle and most importantly, whatever you say MUST be true about yourself.

Try and challenge the group to go beyond easy, everyday examples and to try ‘go if’s..’ that might share a little more about themselves in terms of their beliefs - for example ‘go if you believe in life after death.’ or ‘go if you believe in same sex marriage.’

2) PERSONAL METAPHORS
Metaphors can communicate ideas powerfully. Exploring and expressing who we are through
metaphor allows us to capture our complex and contradictory identities and to work with the unconscious and intuitive as well as the literal and rational.

This activity is designed to give students some space for personal reflection about who they are and what they feel are their core characteristics and values. Give each student a piece of paper and access to a range of colouring pencils, ask them to find a space on their own where they can think and work without being disturbed or distracted by others.

Ask them to decide:
- If you were an animal which animal would you be?
- If you were a type of weather what would you be?
- If you were a landscape...
- If you were a building...
- If you were a plant or tree...

Now ask students to draw around their hand and on the inside of the handprint draw/decorate the different ways they have described themselves. Stress that this is not an art activity and if they find that aspect difficult to try and use the different colours and words to express their ideas.

Now ask students to choose three words to describe who they are and add these words to their hand drawing.

Finally ask students to think of one personal belief which is important to them and add this to the drawing too.

In pairs or small groups share these personal metaphors.

- How did this activity allow you to think about different aspects of yourself?
- What happens if you express yourself in a non literal way?
- Are you able to indentify what your core values and beliefs are?
- Where do your values and beliefs come from?

3) UNDERSTANDING MARTYRDOM - ROLE ON THE WALL

Create a group understanding of the definition of martyrdom and discuss any examples of martyrs you can think of.

Move the class into groups of 4 or 5 and give each group information about a different real martyr to explore (resource 3). Ask the class to use the information to begin to think about how someone might approach representing that person on stage. Acknowledge that each of the people selected have very strong beliefs and that some would be considered extremist, while others might be considered heroic or admirable. We have provided profiles of six people who could be considered to be martyrs; people who have been prepared to sacrifice themselves to a particular cause as a result of their beliefs, some political, others religious. Teachers can use the profiles provided, or with the class research their own examples. This work requires a level of maturity and sensitivity and it is important to consider the kind of issues which may arise for your particular students around this exploration. Our examples include Stephane Charbonnier (the editor of Charlie Hebdo); Malala Yousafzai and Roshanara Choudry, who all took action in relation to Islamic fundamentalism and extremism. We have also included Nelson Mandela and Joan of Arc who provide very different contexts and perspectives. The final example is Bobby Sands (the IRA member who died after leading a hunger strike in the 1980s), as an example of religious and political extremism from recent British history, which students may not be aware of. There are many more examples which you might find more suitable for your particular students.

Give each group a role on the wall outline (resource 4) and ask them to write words inside their figure that they would use to describe their person.
Around the outside of the figure they can write things they think might have contributed to this person becoming a martyr, for example, the times they live in, their personal background and family life, key political events etc. They may have some knowledge about the person they are exploring or they may have very little, so they can write things that they imagine or sense to be true, or they could also write any questions they have.

Now ask students to consider the following questions and their thoughts and responses to their role on the wall:

- What does the person believe in?
- What authority do they draw on?
- What do they want?
- What is in the way of what they want?
- What in the world do they reject?
- How far are they prepared to go for what they believe in?

4) FINDING AN EMPATHETIC CONNECTION

This activity is about trying to imagine the characters’ motivations and develop empathy with extraordinary people, as well as with people we may strongly disagree with.

Introduce the idea of Stanislavsky and emotional memory:

*Emotional or affective memory is when an actor remembers an experience in their past where they felt a similar emotion to that demanded by the role they are playing.*

Ask each student to choose one of the traits from the role on the wall that they can personally identify with - for example it might be they thought the character was ‘passionate’, or ‘stubborn’.

In a space on their own ask students to try and think back to a time or an incident in childhood when they displayed that characteristic or felt that emotion and to remember as much detail about the time as possible; how they felt, what they did and who else was around at the time. It maybe that they cannot recall a specific memory, but it can still be useful to remember something more general, for example; ‘I used to feel powerless when my older brother bossed me around.’

- How does it feel to identify strongly with someone who has a life very different to your own?
- How easy was it to connect with your own emotional memories? What helped you make that connection? What got in the way?

5) STILL IMAGE

Back in groups of four, ask students to share their character traits and the connections they have identified with their own experiences.

Now in their groups, ask them to try and imagine a moment from their person’s childhood that might demonstrate one of the character traits that they have identified. The moment might hint at the person they were to become in later life. Create this moment in a still image. Remind students that they are trying to empathise and understand the person’s experiences and show their point of view, understanding how these experiences shaped the people they later became. One student can play the martyr whilst the other members of the group can play other people who would have been present in these moments.

Now, ask the groups to create an image of their martyr around the time when they spoke the words quoted in the resource. They should decide where they are and what they are doing. Ask what the setting is for this scene and if there is a significant object they would like to place in their image.
6) VERBATIM TEXT

Ask the groups to try to find a way to transition from one image to the next. Now add some of the quotation lines - verbatim - alongside the images. Decide how and when these lines will be integrated; with one person speaking all the lines, or a number of students speaking the words of their ‘martyr’ at different points.

Once again, students are trying to represent their person as accurately as possible and think, feel and speak truthfully as them. This will affect how they use their voices and where they place emphasis.

7) SHARING AND ANALYSIS

See all the groups’ work and hear initial thoughts and responses, asking audiences to return to the questions:

• What does this person believe in?
• What authority do they draw on?
• What do they want?
• What is in the way of what they want?
• What in the world do they reject?
• How far are they prepared to go for what they believe in?

Finally reflect on the contrast between the groups’ work and the process of creating these scenes and identifying with these ‘martyrs’.

• How easy was it to represent the person as logical and reasonable from their perspective?
• What did the martyrs have in common? In what ways were they different?
• Which of these people would you describe as extremist?
• What makes these people extremist?
• What would the challenges be to someone who might need to portray these people on stage?
• To what extent does theatre and drama help us to understand and/or empathise with other people’s experience, belief and perspective?
STÉPHANE CHARBONNIER

Stephane Charbonnier was the editor of Charlie Hebdo, a satirical magazine based in Paris. The magazine was famous for its politically provocative cartoons, often featuring religious figures including the Pope and Muhammad. Charbonnier had strongly defended the magazine’s cartoons featuring the Prophet Muhammad and as a result had received death threats and had been under police protection. He believed in the right of freedom of speech and freedom of expression and within that, the right to offend.

In 2012, after the magazine’s offices had been fire-bombed he told the press:

‘Muhammad isn’t sacred to me.’

‘I don’t blame Muslims for not laughing at our drawings. I live under French law. I don’t live under Koranic law.’

Charbonnier said that incident was an attack against freedom itself and an act by ‘idiot extremists’ not representative of France’s Muslim population.

Apparently Charbonnier told colleagues:

‘I am not afraid of retaliation. I have no kids, no wife, no car, no credit. It perhaps sounds a bit pompous, but I prefer to die standing than living on my knees.’

On 7 January 2015 Charbonnier was killed on the magazine’s premises along with 10 others, by gunmen who claimed to be part of Al Qaeda.

BOBBY SANDS

Throughout his childhood in the 1960’s Bobby Sands experienced sectarian division and violence (Catholic versus Protestant Christians) in his home city of Belfast. As a Catholic he was part of the religious minority in the city.

Sands joined the Provisional IRA (Irish Republican Army) in the 1970’s when he felt that peaceful co-existence was not possible. In 1977 he was imprisoned for 14 years for terrorist activity.

He led a hunger strike in prison demanding that he and other members of the IRA should be treated as political prisoners (or prisoners of war) as opposed to criminals. One aim of the hunger strike was to generate international publicity and to recognise the IRA as freedom fighters and not criminals.

The IRA fought against British Rule in Northern Ireland and for a united Ireland. As well as targeting and killing British soldiers in Northern Ireland the IRA conducted bombings on the British mainland, including pubs and shopping centres, which resulted in dozens of deaths and many more injured.

He said:

‘They won’t break me because the desire for freedom, and the freedom of the Irish people, is in my heart. The day will dawn when all the people of Ireland will have the desire for freedom to show. It is then that we will see the rising of the moon.’

‘Our revenge will be the laughter of our children.’

‘We must see our present fight right through to the very end.’
NELSON MANDELA

Nelson Mandela was classified as a terrorist and imprisoned in 1962 for his action as a member of the African National Congress against the Apartheid system – a system that institutionalised inequality between Black and White South Africans.

In 1985 he was offered release if he ‘unconditionally rejected violence as a political weapon’. He turned the offer down, refusing to renounce violence while the apartheid regime, which he saw as much more violent, continued unchecked. He said:

‘What freedom am I being offered while the organisation of the people [ANC] remains banned? Only free men can negotiate. A prisoner cannot enter into contracts.’

‘The threat evoked no desire in me to play the role of martyr. I was ready to do so if I had to. But the anxiety to live always lingered.’

‘During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.’

He was finally released in 1990 after 27 years in prison.

JOAN OF ARC

Born around 1412 to a peasant farmer, Joan of Arc claimed that she had visions of the saints and heard the voice of God speaking to her. According to Joan, God told her to lead an army against the English in the Hundred Years’ War and to regain France for King Charles 7th.

In 1429, dressed as a man, she led an army against the English at Orleans. She had a number of victories and Charles was re-crowned King. However she was eventually captured by the enemy and put on trial accused of heresy and witchcraft.

When threatened with torture and death she insisted on the truth of her visions:

‘I am not afraid… I was born to do this.’

‘I would rather die than do something which I know to be a sin, or to be against God’s will.’

‘You say that you are my judge; I do not know if you are; but take good heed not to judge me ill, because you would put yourself in great peril.’

‘My Voices did come from God and everything that I have done was by God’s order.’

‘Hold the crucifix up before my eyes so I may see it until I die.’
ROSHONARA CHoudry

In 2010 Roshonara Choudry, a student from East London, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for attempting to kill her local MP, Stephen Timms. When she was arrested she admitted that she had tried to kill him as a punishment, in revenge for the Iraq war - Stephen Timms had voted in parliament for the war in Iraq.

Much of her interview with the police was printed in the media:

‘I thought I should have loyalty to my Muslim brothers and sisters in Palestine.’

‘Because as Muslims we’re all brothers and sisters and we should all look out for each other and we shouldn’t sit back and do nothing while others suffer. We shouldn’t allow the people who oppress us to get away with it and to think that they can do whatever they want to us and we’re just gonna lie down and take it.’

‘I feel like I have ruined the rest of my life. I feel like it’s worth it because millions of Iraqis are suffering and I should do what I can to help them and not just be inactive.’

MALALA YOUSAFZAI

Malala Yousafzai was born in 1997 in Pakistan.

When the Taliban began attacking girls’ schools, Malala started to speak out for the rights of girls to an education. In 2008 she gave a speech entitled ‘How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?’

Malala began to write a blog for the BBC using the name Gul Makai to hide her identity. However her true identity was revealed and the Taliban issued a death threat against her.

On October 9, 2012 Malala was shot while on a bus travelling home from school.

‘All I want is an education, and I am afraid of no one.’

‘I don’t want to be remembered as the girl who was shot. I want to be remembered as the girl who stood up.’

‘The terrorists thought they would change my aims and stop my ambitions, but nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage were born.’
SEQUENCE FOUR

INTERPRETATION

‘Everyone thinks we should talk and find a compromise, and that the Sermon on the Mount is about tolerance…..’ Benjamin in Martyr.

This is a discussion based sequence of activities designed to be used in a R.E, PSHE or English lesson. The activities could also be integrated into a practical Drama scheme of work.

AIMS
To examine the different between literal, conservative and liberal approaches to Christianity.
To think about how a literal interpretation can lead to a distortion of the Bible’s teachings and to extremist behaviour. To consider the questions:

- What can happen when someone treats the Bible as the literal word of God?
- If we treat the Bible as metaphorical stories or moral lessons do we deny its essential message?

EXPLORATIVE STRATEGIES
Text analysis and interpretation, small group discussion, partner sculpting.

1) OPENING DISCUSSION

Explain that in Martyr, the main character, Benjamin, quotes selectively from the Bible to reinforce his beliefs and to insist on his way of living his life. This brings him into conflict with those around him; his teachers, his peers and his mother.

Benjamin’s approach to the Bible is extreme, rigid and uncompromising. He is a literal Christian believing that there is one true God and that His will is written in the Bible. But his beliefs are so extreme that he becomes fundamentalist and intolerant of those who do not share them. Whereas many literal Christians’ evangelism is motivated by compassion and the desire to save others who have not seen the light, Benjamin considers those who do not believe or live in the way he does to be the enemy. This session asks students to consider different beliefs within Christianity and sets them up for watching the play.

2) THE CONCEPTS OF LITERAL, CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL CHRISTIANS

Introduce the following concepts:

LITERAL CHRISTIANS - believe that there is one true God and that only true Christians will go to heaven and everyone else will be excluded. Because they believe this they are often Evangelical Christians who want to convert others in order that they are saved and will be able to go to heaven.

Literal Christians believe the Bible comes directly from God, is literally true and shouldn’t be doubted or questioned. They believe that everything described in the Bible happened; for example the creation of the earth over seven days and Jesus’ miracles. They are certain about their beliefs.

‘Jesus said ‘I am the way, the truth and the life; no one will come to the father except through me.’ (John 14:6)
CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS – believe that Christianity is the only religion with the full truth, but that other religions can help people to reach God. However, they believe Jesus taught that it is those who believe in him who reach heaven and that therefore people who believe in other religions should be encouraged to convert, while people with other faiths should be respected.

‘The Church’s bond with non-Christian religions is in the first place the common origin and end of the human race: All nations form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth, and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city.’ The Catechisms

A conservative Christian is likely to argue for the final authority of the Bible and that its teachings should be used in order to answer difficult ethical questions, however many would feel that isn’t be interpreted literally and that some passages are poetic and open to interpretation.

LIBERAL CHRISTIANS – believe that other religions can lead to God, and are interested in peace, forgiveness and pluralism. Liberal Christians would reject a literal approach to the Bible, seeing much of it as working figuratively and metaphorically; providing teachings which help people reflect on how they live their lives. Liberals accept the scientific and cultural developments that have happened in the last 2000 years and would see many parts of the Bible as being a product of the time in which they were written and no longer relevant to contemporary life. Liberal Christians are likely to acknowledge that Jesus didn’t try to convert the Jews and said ‘in my father’s house there are many rooms, and I am going to prepare a place for you.’ (John 14:2)

In small groups ask students to think of how these three different kinds of Christians might live their lives according to their beliefs:

• How might their beliefs affect how they live their life?
• How might it affect how they treat other people?

Ask students to write their ideas on the worksheet (resource 5).

3) BENJAMIN – INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

Remind students that Benjamin has recently started living his life according to the Bible - he is an literal Christian who uses the Bible as his ultimate authority to determine how he lives and behaves in relation to others.

Give students a copy of resource 6 and ask them to examine the following Bible extracts. In the play they are quoted by Benjamin, who believes them to be the word of God.

‘You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.’ John 8:23

‘When you give a dinner, or a supper, do not ask your friends….nor rich neighbours, lest they also invite you back, and you be prepaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.’ Luke 14:12

In the first column on the table ask students to write how they think Benjamin might interpret these quotes and how this would affect the way he treats other people; his peers, his teachers, his family.
In the second column, students should write how a liberal Christian might interpret these quotes, and what lesson, moral or thought they might draw about how to lead their life. Remind students that many people, Christians as well as non-religious people, treat the Bible as an expression of humans’ relationship with God and as moral guidance providing stories and metaphors which help us reflect on moral, philosophical and metaphysical questions in order to live better lives.

Share the class’ ideas and discuss the different ways in which the same text can be interpreted.

4) THINKING AHEAD TO THE PLAY – GROUP DISCUSSION

Explain that when they come to see the play they will follow Benjamin’s character through a number of different scenes where he comes into contact with people with very different beliefs to his. One of these is his Biology teacher, Miss White. She says:

‘My task is to present reality, how it presents itself from a scientific perspective.’

And she says of Benjamin:

‘He doesn’t recognise himself. He’s experiencing new things with his body and is overwhelmed.’

‘Puberty is a form of temporary insanity.’

In groups, ask students to think about how Benjamin might respond to Miss White:

• How might he behave in her Biology or Chemistry lesson?
• How do you think Benjamin might feel about Miss White?
• She doesn’t say these things to his face, but how might she behave towards him?

Ask students what questions they might have about the play and what they will be looking out for when they come to the Unicorn. Make a list of these questions which you can return to after seeing Martyr.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LITERAL CHRISTIANS</th>
<th>CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS</th>
<th>LITERAL CHRISTIANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

How might their belief affect how they live their life? How might their belief affect how they treat other people, including people with other religions, atheists and agnostics?
When you give a dinner, or a supper, do not ask your friends, nor rich neighbours, lest they also invite you back, and you be prepay'd. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.

You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.

How would Benjamin interpret these quotes? How might this affect the way he treats other people?

How might someone who doesn’t believe the Bible to be the literal word of God interpret these quotes? What moral lesson might they take from each?
POST-SHOW SEQUENCE
BENJMAIN & MISS WHITE

We have created two versions of this post show activity; one which follows on from the discussion based RE or PSHE lesson; the second which will develop the Drama pre-show work. Both sessions focus on the two most extreme characters in the play; Benjamin and Miss White, the two that came into greatest conflict.

OPTION 1: CLASSROOM DISCUSSION BASED ACTIVITIES

AIMS
To share and explore student responses to the play, the actions of the characters and different perspectives on those actions and to draw forward thinking from the pre-show work by considering the following questions:

• Who in the play is a martyr and who would we describe as extremist?
• Can seeing a play like Martyr help us to engage in the challenges of our time in relation to fundamentalism and extremism?

EXPLORATIVE STRATEGIES
Mapping, role on the wall, script reading.

RECREATING THE FINAL SCENE

Explain that you are going to think about the final, dramatic moments of the play. Give students in small groups the map of the Weston Theatre (resource 7) and ask them to draw a rough sketch of the final moments of the play (maybe think about it in terms of an aerial view, with a simple x or stick person representing each character) and then annotate their sketch adding description of:

• What they remember of the characters physicality; what they were doing, their body language and their facial expressions.
• What they remember the characters said (if anything) in the final moments.
• How the set, lighting and sound contributed to the impact of the final scene.

Explain that you are now going to focus in on the two main characters at the end of the show.

ROLE ON THE WALL

Give the groups a role on the wall (resource 4). Ask half the groups to focus on Benjamin and half on Miss White.

Inside their role on the wall ask students to write as many words or phrases as they can to describe the character.

Outside their role on the wall ask students to write what they think their character is reacting to in the modern world and what it is that they reject.
Ask students to share their character role on the walls and discuss how Miss White and Benjamin compare:

• What characteristics do they have in common?
• What characteristics or values are different?

Read, or ask a student to read Miss White's final speech (resource 8).

Have a whole class discussion:

• Who of the two would you describe as a martyr?
• Would you describe either as an extremist?
• Would you describe either of them as a fundamentalist?
• What do you think the play is saying about the nature of fundamentalism and extremism?

Finally discuss Ramin’s quote about the role of theatre in combating fundamentalism.

*The issue of the rise of fundamentalism is deeply troubling to me and one that I am committed to combating, if only through pursuit of theatre, a form that encourages plurality of view, fosters discussion and debate and which is a vital part of the fabric of civic society.* Ramin Gray

• Can seeing a play like Martyr help us to engage in the challenges of our time in relation to fundamentalism and extremism?
OPTION 2: PRACTICAL DRAMA BASED ACTIVITIES

AIMS
To share and explore student responses to the play; examining the actions of the characters and different perspectives on those actions. To draw forward thinking from the pre-show work around how drama can develop empathy and explore multiple perspectives by considering the key questions:

• Who in the play is a martyr and who would we describe as extremist?
• Can seeing a play like Martyr help us to engage in the challenges of our time in relation to fundamentalism and extremism?
• What are we left with as an audience of both individuals and as a collective after seeing the play?

EXPLORATIVE STRATEGIES
Still image, role on the wall, script writing, cross cutting, performance.

RECREATING THE FINAL SCENE
Explain that you are going to recreate the final moments of the play in order to explore the different values, beliefs and perspectives of the characters.

In groups of up to 8 (there are 8 actors in the play) ask students to create a still image of the final scene of the play.

• Show where the actors were on the stage in relation to each other and the cross.
• What was each person doing? Try to capture their physicality and facial expressions.
• Can you remember anything that the characters said in that final scene? Add one line of dialogue for each of the characters if appropriate, or if they did not speak, thought track the other characters.

See each groups’ scene and briefly discuss what stayed with people after seeing the play. Remind students that in live performance, unlike film, members of the audience choose where to focus their attention on the stage and can have quite different experiences.

ROLE ON THE WALL
Explain that we are going to focus in on the two characters that came into greatest conflict in the play; Benjamin and Miss White.

Give the groups a role on the wall (resource 4). Ask half the groups to focus on Benjamin and half on Miss White.

Inside their role on the wall ask students to write as many words or phrases they can come up with to describe the character.

Outside of their role on the wall ask students to write what they think their character is reacting to in the modern world and what it is that they reject.
Ask students to share their character role on the walls and discuss how Miss White and Benjamin compare:

- What characteristics do they have in common?
- What characteristics or values are different?

**ADDRESSING THE AUDIENCE**

Working in pairs; one as Miss White and one as Benjamin, write a final speech for each character. In the play Miss White has an impassioned speech, use what you can remember of that but also write something in your own words.

As a pair rehearse your speeches and how you will perform them to an audience showing the dynamic between the characters.

Share your scenes and discuss Benjamin and Miss White.

- Who of the two is a martyr?
- Would you describe either as an extremist?
- Would you describe either of them as a fundamentalist?
- What do you think the play is saying about the nature of fundamentalism and extremism?

Discuss Ramin’s quote about the role of theatre in combating fundamentalism.

_The issue of the rise of fundamentalism is deeply troubling to me and one that I am committed to combating, if only through pursuit of theatre, a form that encourages plurality of view, fosters discussion and debate and which is a vital part of the fabric of civic society._ Ramin Gray

- Can seeing a play like Martyr help us to engage in the challenges of our time in relation to fundamentalism and extremism?
RESOURCE 7 - PLAN OF THE WESTON THEATRE

STAGE

AUDIENCE

BACK WALL
Miss White:

I belong here. I’m right and you’re not. Because in the autumn the new classes will arrive and I’ll fetch the skeleton from the storeroom, the wide open faces wondering if it’s real, the bone structure, upright walking, heart, circulation, the senses, brain and everyone knows it’s about them, I’ll tell them what they are and they want to hear it because I’m talking about them, a miracle, every single one, even without God, their eyes reading form the blackboard, their mouths and voices when they’re asking questions, the elbows they’re leaning on, their fingers holding pens and writing, the constantly nervous legs that fidget under their desks, their feet sliding backwards and forwards on the linoleum in little sandals that carried them here all the way from home. Their feet. I’m not leaving. I’m right.
MARTYR

A Unicorn / Actors Touring Company production

By Marius von Mayenburg
Translated by Maja Zade
Directed by Ramin Gray

Resource pack written by Catherine Greenwood
Developed with Ella Macfadyen
Activities developed with students and staff at Paddington Academy