

Can online audio drama provide a positive alternative to schools touring?

By Jo Carter

In a world where digital media shapes much of young people's lives, at Immediate Theatre we have been looking to harness the power of audio storytelling to create Rift, an innovative audio drama designed specifically for educational settings.

Recognising the challenges for schools of booking live theatre tours and the rising costs of production, we are exploring a new approach of bringing contemporary drama to the classroom. This pilot production addresses pressing issues such as misogyny, discrimination, and prejudice, offering a platform for students to explore and discuss these topics in depth. Rather than being available to a handful of schools for a limited period, this new approach is accessible online for FREE for at least the next five years. It enables teachers to access contemporary drama to fit their own schedule and has been designed in such a way that it can be used both by those teaching drama and those wanting to focus on the social issues it explores.

Crafting a Relevant Narrative

Immediate Theatre is embedded in the community providing eight free youth theatres in Hackney and working regularly in schools. We are very much aware of the rise in negative attitudes towards women and challenges faced by not only young people, but also teachers in addressing the rise in misogyny. *Rift* is the result of a collaborative effort between Immediate

Theatre and young people from the community. Written by Abi Falase, the drama follows a group of teenagers navigating the complexities of modern social and online environments. The narrative not only captivates but also prompts critical conversations about societal challenges, making exciting drama and a valuable educational tool.

Rift by Abi Falase

Chi loves her twin brother, TikTok-famous, Kam, but why does she always have to clean up his mess? Since a kiss captured on social media cost Chi her best friend, Ella, she has been focusing on her GCSEs and planning to get away. Charlie is proud of his 'menimist' approach to life, but has he thought this through? Now everyone's stuck at the Geography residential and things could really get out of hand. Can Ella and Chi find female solidarity? Will Kam and Charlie ever wake up to the impact of their privilege? *I write what I like to call 'Feel Good Social Realism', I wrap big political and societal discussions about everything from race and gender to faith and sexuality in pockets of comedy, because if you don't laugh, you'll cry.* Abi Falase is multidisciplinary artist, writer and director, reimagining fundamental societal concepts in inventive new worlds.

Why choose the audio format?

Immediate Theatre discovered the potential of creating audio drama during lockdown when our Theatre Exchange (Over 60s) group worked online and produced several excellent audio dramas. With a very limited budget we were able to take our audience from Hackney to Hades, from a snowy blizzard to a Greek taverna. With the growth in podcast listening from younger audiences we felt it was time to

introduce younger people to the potential of this format which can be listened to at any time and can stretch the imagination into different realms and realities. One of the unique benefits of an Audio Drama is that the audience can form their own images of the characters and settings in their minds: therefore, everyone can form their own interpretations. Having experienced multiple issues with confirming a live tour of *Rift* to schools we decided to pilot our first audio play for schools. We are hoping that this project will prove successful so that we can increase the availability of new and relevant drama to teachers across the country.

Educational Resources for Comprehensive Learning

To enhance the educational experience, we have provided a comprehensive activity pack created by an experienced drama teacher to accompany the audio play. It provides a great variety of approaches, including: picking out key moments for discussion; physicalising characters and situations; using forum theatre techniques; and asking the students to write their own alternative scenes. The pack allows teachers to go into greater depth than a post-show workshop and maximises the learning opportunities.

Rift free resources here



The pack includes:

- **Drama Resources:** Activities linked to each scene that encourage empathy, critical thinking, and drama skills development.
- **PSHE Resources:** Materials that facilitate discussions on personal, social, and health education topics.
- **Additional Support:** Information on organisations offering further guidance to young people.
- **Character Profiles:** Detailed insights into the characters, fostering deeper understanding and engagement.
- **Additional Materials:** Short scripts written by young women providing additional resources for young people to explore.

The resources, targeted at Year 9 students, break up the material into six sessions but are designed to be flexible, allowing educators to tailor sessions to their students' needs, promoting collaboration and personal growth in a supportive environment. Given the sensitive themes addressed in *Rift*, Immediate Theatre advises that educators preview the audio play to ensure it aligns with their students' maturity levels and to facilitate informed discussions.

A Commitment to Social Change
Immediate Theatre's approach extends beyond *Rift*. Established in 1996, the organisation has consistently aimed to involve communities in London in creative projects that inspire well-being and foster social change. Our approach combines grassroots engagement with a holistic methodology, ensuring that initiatives like *Rift* resonate deeply with participants.

Conclusion

Rift exemplifies how audio drama can serve as a powerful educational medium, addressing complex social issues while fostering empathy and critical engagement among students. The integration of narrative and resources provides educators with a dynamic tool to enrich their teaching and support the development of socially conscious young individuals.

Please let us know what you think and help us develop and improve this new approach to getting contemporary drama into the classroom and tell us what you would like us to do next.



Jo Carter is the Artistic Director of Immediate Theatre which she founded in 1996 to create a relationship between her work and the community in which she lives, Hackney. Over the past 27 years she has co-produced theatre addressing a range of critical issues facing the community.



Endorsements from the Educational Community

Teachers engaged in the pilot workshops commented:
It encourages students to use their imagination and introduces them to another form of drama.
The students really enjoyed the workshops which focussed on important issues.

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