

# NOUGHTS & CROSSES



## TEACHING PACK:

A Multidisciplinary Framework  
for Teaching Power,  
Representation and Race  
through *Noughts & Crosses*



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# About this Resource

Resource Pack produced by Pilot Theatre

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With thanks to: Nadya Bettioui, Carolyn Bradley, Lorraine Douglas, and Pilot Theatre's Learning Advisory Board.

This resource pack supports the teaching of Sabrina Mahfouz's adaptation of *Noughts & Crosses* by Malorie Blackman. Please note this resource includes plot spoilers, and includes extensive content about discrimination, racism, and prejudice.

This resource may be of particular interest to those teaching the play as a set-text for the Eduqas GCSE Drama syllabus (KS4), and for those teaching the play for English (KS3), or for PSHE (KS3-5).

This pack complements the existing resources for *Noughts & Crosses* produced by Pilot Theatre, which includes lesson plans for English and Drama, and filmed scene extracts from the theatre production. The resource can be purchased at <https://pilot-theatre.com/for-teachers/resources/>

We are not responsible for the content of external links, and we strongly recommend checking the suitability of external content before sharing with your students.

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations to *Noughts & Crosses* are from the play-text published by Nick Hern Books. The material in this pack may be reproduced for classroom use only.

If you have any questions or feedback about this resource pack, please contact [info@pilot-theatre.com](mailto:info@pilot-theatre.com)

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## The Resource Writers



Lynette Carr Armstrong has been an English, Drama and Media teacher and adviser for over thirty years. She has taught in a variety of London schools and worked in local authorities and nationally, focusing on school improvement, leadership, wider curriculum development and assessment. Lynette works as an independent consultant and has most recently collaborated with Samantha Wharton to write the Nick Hern Books study guide for Winsome Pinnock's *Leave Taking*.



Samantha Wharton is an experienced teacher with nearly two decades in education. She completed her PGCE in English and Drama at the IOE and holds an MA in Black British Literature from Goldsmiths University. Currently teaching at St Angela's School, she has taught English, Drama and Media Studies. Samantha has worked as a Drama consultant, delivered talks and written content for AQA and OCR, and is a former Edexcel Drama examiner. She authored the official study guide for Winsome Pinnock's *Leave Taking* (NHB Publishing) and writes educational content for Lit in Colour and the British Library. Her mission is to ensure students encounter diverse literature that reflects them.

## Framework Overview

<b>Introduction and Rationale</b>	<b>Key Moments and Timeline of the Play</b>	<b>Authorship - Blackman and Mahfouz's Vision</b>	<b>The Interplay of Power, Representation and Race</b>	<b>Key Social, Historical and Literary Influences</b>	<b>Teaching for Depth: Context, Knowledge and Interpretation</b>	<b>Further Guidance and Resources</b>	<b>Glossary of Terms</b>
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# 1. Introduction and Rationale

## Rationale: Purpose of Framework

This framework is designed to enable teachers to explore the significance of Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses*, as adapted for the stage by Sabrina Mahfouz. Mahfouz makes thoughtful and faithful choices in her retelling and vision for performance, skilfully editing and expanding key ideas while remaining anchored to the concepts at the heart of the original novel. As such, this framework is driven by those central ideas, with the aim of supporting teachers to deepen their understanding of the social, historical and cultural elements embedded in the play.

As you work through the framework, our aim is to increase both understanding and enjoyment of the text, while offering practical insights and suggestions for classroom teaching. We recognise the sensitivity of some of the play's underpinning themes and believe that well-informed planning enhances, rather than limits, engagement. The play can be approached on a literal level; however, we argue that critical questioning and contextual exploration create opportunities for students and teachers to learn together, drawing meaningful connections between the real world and Blackman's dystopia.

This framework supports English and Drama teachers in teaching *Noughts & Crosses* in ways that explicitly develop students' understanding of **power, representation and race** within wider societal structures. It aims to strengthen students' ability to respond critically to the text — both in reading and performance — and offers guidance on additional texts that explore related themes.

## Key Objectives

- Explore how systems, structures, and power construct and maintain bias.
- Analyse how individual characters respond to and are shaped by these systems.
- Evaluate the tension and duality between systemic power and individual accountability.
- Distinguish clearly between prejudice and racism.
- Move classroom teaching towards informed, critical, and reflective responses.
- Equip teachers with clear language and practical guidance for navigating contentious discussions with confidence.

## How to Use the Framework for the Play and Beyond...

1. To provide context and deeper understanding
2. To develop schemes of work
3. For comparing your own thoughts with the framework ideas
4. As a segue into wider research
5. To map the play's narrative
6. As a frame for studying other texts from diverse cultures or texts that deal with power, etc.
7. As training in your department
8. For cross-curricular working

This framework treats *Noughts & Crosses* not as a thought experiment, but as a **serious political and literary intervention**.

## 2. Key Moments and Timeline of the Play

Timeline	Key Moments	Power, Representation and Race and Links to Social and Historical Events / Commentary
<b>Prologue</b>		
<b>Several years before the events of the play take place</b>	Fast forward but in flashback - Callum and Sephy older children and the point where Meggie is sacked because she does not corroborate Jasmine's lies.	Established that there is subjugation, inequality and <b>power</b> as Jasmine has the power to sack Meggie.  Sephy and Callum have to continue their friendship in secret - segregation/apartheid = <b>racism</b>
<b>Act One</b>		
	Anticipating Callum starting at Heathcroft	Inequality due to <b>racism</b> . Noughts and Crosses are <b>segregated</b> - correlation with <b>Apartheid South Africa and desegregation of schools in the US</b> . <b>Representation</b> - would be one of a few Noughts in a Cross School.
	Double scene - Hadleys/McGregors - their homes - TV report - bomb LM and integration of schools announcement. Kamal's speech p.10 - 'It's Dad's policy' p.11 - Sephy's naive view compared to Jude's response 'Blah blah blah!' p.10 - Meggie's view on integration p.13 - Ryan's view on	The differing responses and views to the way their society is constructed, their positions within that society informs their views. Class system at play = <b>power</b>

	social mobility	<b>How the news is used to shape the representation of Noughts /bias</b>
	Hint about Lynette's situation - mental health p.15	How <b>racism</b> impacts mental health, safety - lack of support for Noughts - <b>historically high incident of Black people in the mental health system in the UK.</b>
<b>That evening</b>	Kamal and Andrew - his political views - racism - tokenism - spying - traitors - Sephy and her response to 'blankers' pp.18-19	How tokenism plays a part in the reluctant dismantling of <b>power</b> structures in order to maintain a new form of power and control in favour of the already powerful.
<b>The next day</b>	The school protest as Callum/Noughts arrive p.19 Sephy's outburst/display of her own racism The McGregor's response - Callum	<b>Desegregation of schools in the US</b> showing the <b>racism</b> and opposition to sharing <b>privilege</b> and wishing to maintain the <b>status quo</b>
	P.22 at the McGregors First sign that Jude is in LM p.23 - Meggie expresses non-violent approach	Civil Rights in US and UK (uprising/riots in the 80s) Apartheid South Africa - armed struggle/terrorism - ANC - Ghandi
<b>The next day</b>	Simultaneous scene - attack on Sephy/fight and argument Callum and Jude - stopped by Mr Bowden/Ryan - also discover what happened to Lynette p.28 three years prior	<b>Impact of racism</b> , policing each other within oppression and within groups with power.
	Ryan on violence p.33 'no change at all happens without violence' - Callum discovers Lynette's letter and disappearance - Police inform of Lynette's death	Debate on armed struggle/terrorism - the passage of time leading to legitimisation e.g. IRA, ANC
<b>Time lapse - months Day of Bomb attack</b>	Time passes and Sephy and Callum arrange to meet at Cuckoo Cafe - Jude tries to stop Callum leaving for the Dundale shopping centre - Callum realises Sephy is in danger - Bomb - saves Sephy p.40	Mirrors terrorist attacks and questions legitimacy of LM when innocent people are killed.

<b>Evening</b>	McGregors - Jude confesses, Meggie accuses them of being 'brainwashed' - Jude and Ryan leave p.42	<b>Ideology</b> and raising questions of how one fights against <b>power</b> and <b>racism</b> that is embedded into society's structures.
<b>Days later - lapse of months</b>	Raid on McGregors' home - Callum arrested - Kelani Adams QC - Benefactor - anonymous – Callum's realisation p.45 that Jude planted the bomb. Court - Sephy and Callum's perspectives - video evidence - Sephy testifies	Criminalisation of Callum The degree to which those who are part of the <b>power group</b> join with the oppressed to fight against <b>racism</b> . There is a sense in the play that ' <b>justice</b> ' is swift when it comes to Noughts and investigations are not thorough because the outcome is predetermined.
	Ryan found guilty and sentenced to public execution - Sephy made to attend - stay of execution p.53 - Ryan's thoughts p.54	Links to lynching - public spectacle - Jim Crow <b>Capital punishment</b> - how it can be used to reinforce <b>power structures</b> , the over <b>representation</b> of marginalised groups and <b>racism</b> .
	Ryan's escape and death - Kamal's response	Martyrdom, maintenance of <b>power and state terror</b> .
<b>Act Two</b>		
<b>Three years on</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensemble - questions letters</li> <li>● Three years on - flashback to Sephy giving Meggie a letter for Callum</li> <li>● Flashback with Jude</li> <li>● Callum has left Heathcroft</li> <li>● decides to join LM - revenge</li> <li>● Meggie gives him letter</li> <li>● Sephy's time at school</li> <li>● letter from Callum</li> </ul>	How subjugation and racism can lead to <b>radicalisation</b> .

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● They meet -</li> <li>● Sephy is Kidnapped by LM and set up by Callum</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● news Kamal stepping down p.62</li> <li>● Callum and Jude tension - loyalty</li> <li>● Sephy recognises Andrew's voice</li> <li>● Callum finally reads Sephy's letter p.65</li> <li>● Sephy believes they plan to kill her p.66</li> <li>● Sephy's activism - power p.66</li> <li>● they make love - Jude interrupts - Sephy escapes - Morgan shot</li> <li>● Sephy's perspective - tells Callum about Andrew and Callum allows Sephy to escape</li> </ul>	How the state uses intelligence to penetrate <b>dissident</b> groups.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Kamal tries to blackmail Sephy into an abortion and in exchange avoid Callum receiving death penalty</li> <li>● Callum's death</li> </ul>	How <b>power</b> corrupts. <b>Ideology</b> becomes more important than the wellbeing of family.

### 3. Authorship: Blackman and Mahfouz's Vision



#### Malorie Blackman

Malorie Blackman felt the need to write *Noughts & Crosses* for a 'number of

*factors, including - but not limited to - a need to deal with a number of events from my past, a desire to tackle the subject of racism head on, and the burning anger I felt regarding the death of Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent mishandling of the police inquiry into his death.'*

She is driven by the lead characters and the theme of love and how this intertwines with the realities of

racism, power, class and the fight back against all of these constructs.

Blackman asserts that many of Callum's experiences mirror her own teenage awakenings to the banality of racism:

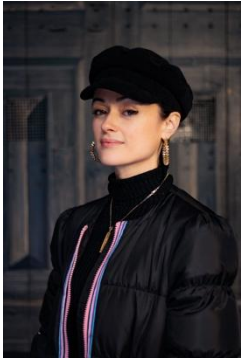
*'events like enduring his history lesson, or being challenged for being in a first-class carriage on a train\*. All this made Noughts & Crosses the most painful, personal, challenging, cathartic and satisfying book I'd written to date.'* [\*from the novel]

Blackman is also keen to **challenge the status quo** in her characterisation of racism by making readers think about how comfortable and accepting we have become with inequities in society. By literally turning the concept of racism on its head and centring the Crosses as the group with power, our natural empathy based on our own experiences are constantly played.

Blackman also invites us truly to understand how societal structures and class operate in a way that is easily understood by the reader in this fictional world she creates. This contrasts with the constant pushback and denial of this in the society in which we live and how this is mirrored through the cognitive dissonance we constantly see in Sephy's character.

Blackman asserts:

*'I knew I was writing a book that would make some adults very uncomfortable (and it did!) because I was dealing with racism, terrorism, the class system and the artificial divides we always seem to put between ourselves and others.'*



## Sabrina Mahfouz

Mahfouz's adaptation twenty years on from Blackman's novel is very much a

commitment to the universality of the issues raised in the novel and its currency today. She writes:

*'We still live in a systemically racist society, no matter how loudly this may be refuted by those at the top of it. Opportunities are still largely determined by what background you are born into, no matter how many like to, or need to, believe that we live in a meritocracy.'*

She goes on to insist that it is not simply an

*"American/historical/colonial" thing.'*

Mahfouz's aim, like Blackman's, is also to showcase the love and extraordinariness of both Callum and Sephy and asserts:

*'This is what I wanted to draw on stage the most. These two flawed, fantastic, brave, young people - in love, lost, full of hope and rage, dreams and desires, challenging a supremacist system just by being their complicated selves.'* p.V

## 4. The Interplay of Power, Representation and Race

### Definitions

Below we introduce some broad definitions of **power, representation and race** in order to provide a frame that will be expanded as you move through the framework and make connections with the play, its characters and ideas presented by Blackman and Mahfouz.

#### Power

**The capacity to influence decisions, shape narratives, control resources, or determine outcomes for individuals or groups.** Throughout the framework, we will examine how Blackman (and in turn Mahfouz in the play) spotlights the variety and all-encompassing ways that the Crosses exercise total authority over the lives of the Noughts. At every turn we see how absolute power ensures that the status quo is maintained and any attempts to circumvent it (even if you are part of the powerful group, like Sephy) prove futile. However, the play simultaneously provides many examples of the challenge to power. Blackman uses historical and contemporary power structures to influence the construction of *Noughts & Crosses*.

Power forms the backdrop to all the prohibitions on the lives of Noughts and how systems and structures work against their interests. Conversely, we see how individual power and privilege can be leveraged to positive and negative effects. Jasmine Hadley uses her power to dismiss Meggie simply because Meggie refuses to lie on Jasmine's behalf. Jasmine is later seen using that same power and privilege to pay for Ryan's defence. In many ways, the play, and Blackman's vision, is to explore how power can be used as a source of beneficial change, but so often, it is not.

#### Representation

**The presence and portrayal of different groups in cultural, political, or social spaces, including who is visible, heard, and depicted.** The play explicitly portrays the way in which everything is set up to the advantage of the Crosses. They run society, which means that their interests are always centred at the expense of the Noughts. This poses the question: what must this mean in the daily lives of Noughts and the extent to which they are excluded and misrepresented? The direct correlation with power cannot be ignored as, put simply, the power held by the Crosses

enables them to represent themselves favourably and reinforce themselves through the media, advertising and history, for example.

## Race

**A socially constructed system of categorising people based on perceived physical differences, historically used to justify unequal treatment and distribution of power.** It is clear that we are meant to see the Noughts as inferior and the Crosses as superior. Socially, the play presents many examples of how the Noughts' lives are blighted and prohibited because of their skin colour. The historical background of Noughts is that they were once enslaved by the colonising Crosses and that the justification of their treatment now is based and influenced by their subjugation in the past. Sephy and Callum are examples of the futility of racism as we see them interact on an equal basis even though the structures around them create arguments and barriers.

# Core Principles

## 1. History is Shaped by Those in Power



Yousuf Karsh, *The Roaring Lion*. Photograph. 1941.

## 2. Racism Functions Structurally and Emotionally

*'The outrage over Sainsbury's Christmas ad with a Black family proves it: racism in the UK never stopped'* Independent



*Gravy Song*, Sainsbury's, Dec 2020.

## 3. Representation Carries Weight and Consequence



## 4. Marginalised Groups are Not Monolithic



Kim Aldis, *Brixton Riots*. Photograph. 1981.

## 5. Class Systems Shape Power and Belonging



## 6. Activism, Resistance and Rebellion Emerge Under Unequal Conditions



Blue plaque erected by Nubian Jak Community Trust at 439 New Cross Road, London, SE14 6TA to commemorate the 13 Black teenagers who lost their lives after a widely suspected racist arson attack.

## Exploring Connections Between Core Principles and Power, Representation, Race

These principles underpin the exploration of Power, Representation, and Race within the text. They are intended to prompt reflection, guide further research, as well as providing ideas for exploring with students in the classroom

Core Principles	Power	Representation	Race
<b>1. History is Shaped by Those in Power</b>	The play invites audiences to question whose histories are told, whose are erased, and how control of narrative helps maintain inequality.	The play suggests that <b>rewriting history is itself a form of activism</b> . By questioning what is taught, remembered, and celebrated, characters challenge the structures that maintain inequality.	Political, social and historical power is racialised. The dominant group controls education, language, law and memory. Resistance includes rewriting narratives, not just rebelling physically
<b>2. Racism Functions Structurally and Emotionally</b>	<b>Structural racism</b> Embedded within institutions, laws, education, and employment systems that limit opportunity and maintain racial hierarchy.	Sephy does <b>not</b> experience racism. As a Cross, she belongs to the dominant group and is protected by the very systems that oppress Noughts. However, Blackman shows that racist systems also <b>police the emotions and behaviour of those within the dominant group</b> , particularly when they challenge social norms.	<b>Emotional racism</b> Operating through fear, anger, guilt, denial, love, loyalty, and trauma, shaping how characters understand — or fail to understand — injustice.

<p><b>3. Representation Carries Weight and Consequence</b></p>	<p>Who is seen, valued, and reflected in everyday life shapes identity, belonging, and safety. The play shows that absence, distortion, or marginalisation in representation has <b>emotional, social, and even physical consequences.</b></p>	<p>The play links representation to survival: being unseen or misrepresented can contribute to fear, anxiety, and vulnerability.</p>	<p>How everyday products and imagery centre Cross bodies and experiences.</p>
<p><b>4. Marginalised Groups are Not Monolithic</b></p>	<p>The Nought community is often perceived through stereotypes by those in power.</p>	<p>However, the play actively challenges the idea that marginalised groups think, behave, or respond in the same way (see how the McGregor family's view differ from character to character).</p>	<p>Seeing the Noughts as a monolith means that individuals are seen as lacking distinct physical features and feelings. This enables the dominant group to dehumanise the experiences of the Noughts.</p>

<p><b>5. Class Systems Shape Power and Belonging</b></p>	<p>Cross privilege and Nought struggle are not individual circumstances, but the result of a system designed to preserve power.</p>	<p>The rights of Noughts are not represented within Cross society and Kamal as Home Secretary simply perpetuates the needs of his class and group.</p>	<p>Lynette's mental health and the lack of resources because of her race. We also see the prevention of moving beyond class and race (by fellow Noughts) in the attack on Lynette and her Cross boyfriend.</p>
<p><b>6. Activism, Resistance, and Rebellion Emerge Under Unequal Conditions</b></p>	<p>The play presents resistance not as a single unified response but as a spectrum shaped by unequal conditions.</p>	<p>The views of Noughts are only represented and actioned in a tokenistic way.</p>	<p>The predicament of Noughts is determined by their race and the historical positioning of the group as enslaved. It is very difficult for Noughts to challenge the systems through diplomatic routes.</p>

## How the Core Principles Link to the Play and its Ideas

### 1. History is Shaped by Those in Power *‘History is written by the victors’ – a quote attributed to Winston Churchill*

History and “truth” are not neutral. The play invites audiences to question how **official narratives** help maintain inequality by privileging the perspectives of those in power. When political and social authority is racialised, the dominant group controls education, language, law, and public memory. As a result, historical knowledge can reinforce hierarchy rather than challenge it.

Within this system, resistance is not only physical rebellion. It also involves **questioning dominant narratives, reclaiming erased histories, and challenging what is presented as truth.**

#### Structural Control of History and Knowledge

- The Cross-dominated system controls schools, curriculum, and historical record.
- Official histories are presented as objective but reflect the priorities of those in power.
- Nought contributions and experiences are marginalised or omitted.

Callum recognises this imbalance:

*‘Nah, I’ll just cross out all the lies in the history books one by one over the next three years till it’s one big sea of Biro and they have to rewrite them!’ (p.8)*

This line highlights key power dynamics:

#### History, Power, and Resistance

- Political, social, and historical power in the play is racialised.
- Control of narrative reinforces Cross dominance and Nought marginalisation.
- Reclaiming history becomes an act of resistance.
- Challenging official narratives is presented as a necessary step toward **justice.**

The play suggests that **rewriting history is itself a form of activism.** By questioning what is

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Who controls knowledge</b> → Crosses control education and curriculum.</li> <li>● <b>Who defines truth</b> → Institutions protect dominant narratives.</li> <li>● <b>Who must challenge them</b> → The humour in Callum’s comment underscores a serious reality: when institutions are controlled by one group, rewriting history becomes the responsibility of those excluded from it.</li> </ul>	<p>taught, remembered, and celebrated, characters begin to challenge the structures that sustain inequality.</p>
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## 2. Racism Functions Structurally and Emotionally

Racism is not presented solely as overt hostility or individual prejudice. Instead, the play exposes racism as operating on **two interconnected levels**:

- **Structural racism**  
Embedded within institutions, laws, education, and employment systems that limit opportunity and maintain racial hierarchy.
- **Emotional racism**  
Operating through fear, anger, guilt, denial, love, loyalty, and trauma, shaping how characters understand — or fail to understand — injustice.

### Key Examples from the Play

<p><b>Structural Racism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Noughts’ opportunities are systemically limited, regardless of talent or effort.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Emotional Racism</b></p> <p><b>Sephy’s experience: emotional harm without structural oppression</b></p>
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- Ryan explains the narrow futures available to Noughts:

*“Meggie, if our boy is going to get anywhere in this life, if he’s not going to wind up working at the dump, the lumberyard, cleaning up after Crosses”*  
(p.13)

This shows that **aspiration itself is racially constrained**. Employment, dignity, and social mobility are controlled by the Cross-dominated system.

- Jude reinforces systemic barriers when he is denied an apprenticeship.
  - Demonstrates how **structural exclusion breeds frustration and resentment**, especially for young people.

Sephy does **not** experience racism. As a Cross, she belongs to the dominant group and is protected by the very systems that oppress Noughts. However, Blackman shows that racist systems also **police the emotions and behaviour of those within the dominant group**, particularly when they challenge social norms.

Her question to Lola — *‘Why do you hate them so much?’* (p.26) frames racism as a matter of personal feeling rather than systemic power. This reflects Sephy’s privilege: she is insulated from the structural consequences of racism and therefore interprets it primarily at an emotional level.

In the ensemble scene in which Sephy is called a ‘Blanker lover’ (p.27), pushed, and publicly humiliated, Blackman shows how racist societies enforce conformity through **social punishment**. Sephy is targeted not because she lacks power, but because she threatens the racial order by crossing its boundaries. Sephy cannot retaliate meaningfully, not because she is powerless, but because dominant-group membership comes with expectations of silence, loyalty, and compliance.

Her family trauma — including her mother’s alcoholism and suicide attempt — reinforces that personal suffering can coexist with privilege. Blackman does not equate emotional pain with oppression; instead, she shows how emotional distress can obscure structural advantage.

## Emotional Limits of Allyship

Sephy struggles to protect Callum or challenge the system.

- After the bombing, she tells Callum to return to the Liberation Militia.
  - She sees the LM primarily as a threat to her safety, rather than as a response to **injustice**.
  - Shows that those benefiting from an unjust system may **emotionally reject resistance**.
- Her position as the cabinet minister's daughter places her firmly within the power structure, even as she feels morally opposed.
  - This highlights how **good intentions alone cannot dismantle systemic racism**.

## Key Quote / Example

Callum observes the limits placed on Noughts:

*“if our boy is going to get anywhere in this life...”* (Ryan, p.13)

- shows **who controls opportunity** → Crosses control employment and social mobility.
- shows **who bears the burden** → Noughts must navigate systemic barriers.
- allyship is optimal when embedded within institutions / structural systems, where power influences change.

### 3. Representation Carries Weight and Consequence

Representation is not neutral. Who is seen, valued, and reflected in everyday life shapes identity, belonging, and safety. The play shows that absence, distortion, or marginalisation in representation has **emotional, social, and even physical consequences**. The play suggests that representation is not simply about visibility — it is about **value, protection, and recognition**.

#### Everyday Representation and Invisibility

- Shania highlights a seemingly small but powerful example of exclusion when she says, “*they don’t sell plasters in my skin tone*” (p.24)
  - Reveals how everyday products and imagery centre Cross bodies and experiences.
  - Shows how **invisibility in representation shapes self-worth and belonging**.
  - Suggests that what is considered “normal” is racially defined.

#### Representation, Pressure, and the Body

- We see how Callum is, “*finding it hard to - breathe*” and that he feels overwhelmed and unsafe (p.25)
  - Reflects the emotional and physical toll of living within a racially oppressive system.
  - Echoes real-world moments where racialised bodies are placed under extreme pressure and threat.
  - Suggests that lack of representation and constant marginalisation can have **physical and mental consequences**

#### Representation and Power

- Dominant groups control media, education, and public narratives.
- This determines whose stories are visible and whose are ignored.
- When Nought experiences are absent or distorted, Cross dominance is reinforced.
- Representation becomes a site of power:
  - who is humanised
  - who is centred
  - who is overlooked

<p>These everyday omissions reinforce the idea that Noughts exist outside the norm, subtly maintaining hierarchy.</p>	<p>The play links representation to survival: being unseen or misrepresented can contribute to fear, anxiety, and vulnerability.</p>	
<p><b>Key ideas the play communicates:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representation shapes identity and belonging.</li> <li>• Everyday omissions reinforce structural inequality.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key idea the play communicates:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misrepresentation and invisibility can have emotional and physical consequences.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key idea the play communicates:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging representation is part of challenging power.</li> </ul>

#### 4. Marginalised Groups are Not Monolithic

The Nought community is often perceived through stereotypes by those in power. However, the play actively challenges the idea that marginalised groups think, behave, or respond in the same way. Within the McGregor family alone, there is a **range of perspectives, strategies, and emotional responses** to oppression. This diversity highlights that marginalised groups are not a single, unified voice, but are made up of individuals navigating inequality in different ways.

The play invites audiences to question how stereotypes flatten complexity and how power structures benefit when marginalised groups are viewed as one-dimensional.

#### Varied experience within the McGregor family

<p><b>Ryan – activism and pride</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ryan is politically aware, outspoken, and determined that Callum should represent Nought dignity.</li> <li>● He encourages resistance and self-respect: <i>“You just go there tomorrow and hold your head up high, son, show those Crosses that we Noughts respect ourselves and won’t be intimidated” p.14</i></li> <li>● Represents a more confrontational, activist response to oppression.</li> <li>● Believes in collective pride and visible resistance.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Callum – aspiration and strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Callum is ambitious and focused on education as a pathway to change.</li> <li>● He challenges his father’s framing: <i>“Or I might just go there to learn, Dad, cos that’s why I’m going. Not to be the rent-a-Nought for Crosses with a conscience”. p.14</i></li> <li>● Shows awareness of tokenism and the burden placed on him.</li> <li>● Represents a pragmatic approach: navigating the system while recognising its limits.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Meggie – hope and protection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Meggie is hopeful and protective, wanting stability and opportunity for her children.</li> <li>● She recognises structural barriers: <i>“we’ll always be second-class nothings.” p.13</i></li> <li>● Balances realism about inequality with a desire for safety and progress.</li> <li>● Represents emotional endurance within oppressive conditions.</li> <li>● Separatism framing - <i>“even better, give us our own decent schools so we can stay well clear of yours!” p.11</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Challenging Stereotypes and Assumptions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The play shows that there is <b>no single Nought perspective</b>.</li> <li>● Characters disagree on strategy, identity, and how best to survive or resist.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Representation and Complexity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The McGregor family demonstrates varied responses to oppression: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ activism</li> <li>○ aspiration</li> <li>○ caution</li> <li>○ anger</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

- This internal diversity disrupts simplistic stereotypes about marginalised groups.

Callum challenges assumptions about Nought behaviour:

*'What did you mean? 'Behaving like —' What do we behave like?' p.21*

- This moment exposes how stereotypes operate.
- It forces characters (and audiences) to confront how quickly marginalised groups are generalised.
- Highlights how dominant narratives diminish individuality.

- hope

- These differences show that marginalised communities contain **multiple identities, beliefs, and strategies**, not a single unified stance.
- Stereotyping benefits dominant groups by simplifying and controlling how marginalised people are understood.
- Other members of the McGregor family have different experiences. Jude and Lynette show that marginalised groups are not a monolith. Though from the same family and shaped by the same racist power structures, they respond in sharply different ways—Jude through radicalised resistance and Lynette through internalised trauma—highlighting how oppression produces varied, deeply individual experiences rather than a single unified response.

## 5. Class Systems Shape Power and Belonging

Class is deeply intertwined with race. The class system is not neutral; it is divisive, reinforcing hierarchy, limiting mobility, and determining who belongs and who is excluded. Cross privilege and Nought struggle are not individual circumstances, but the result of a system designed to preserve power.

**Class, Privilege, and Structural Division**

**Political Power and Class Authority**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sephy grows up with wealth, security, and political access.</li> <li>● Callum grows up with economic instability, racial exclusion, and limited opportunity.</li> <li>● The class system works to keep Noughts suppressed, ensuring that power, wealth, and decision-making remain concentrated among Crosses.</li> </ul> <p>Meggie articulates this clearly:</p> <p><i>“As long as Crosses run the schools — and everything else — we’ll always be second-class nothings.” p.13</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Shows how class and race operate together.</li> <li>● Education is identified as a key site of control.</li> <li>● Nought achievements are erased from history, reinforcing inferiority and exclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● As Home Secretary, Kamal Hadley represents institutional class power.</li> <li>● He is a key political decision-maker, far removed from the lived realities of Nought communities.</li> </ul> <p>His belief in the death penalty --- <i>“It is right that those found guilty suffer the death sentence” p.10</i> — demonstrates how those in power can remain morally detached from the unequal systems they uphold.</p> <p>His ignorance of Nought suffering highlights how class privilege enables distance, allowing injustice to be framed as law and order rather than oppression.</p>	
<p><b>Labour, Survival, and Masking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Economic struggle is a constant pressure on Nought families. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Meggie is unemployed.</li> <li>○ Ryan is denied access to stable, skilled work.</li> <li>○ Jude is refused an apprenticeship despite ability.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Class, Reputation, and Belonging</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Hadley name carries significant social capital.</li> <li>● Jasmine warns Minerva not to bring shame on the family name pp.13–14</li> </ul> <p>Reputation functions as a form of class protection. This contrasts sharply with Nought families,</p>	<p><b>Class and Mental Health</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lynette’s mental illness exposes another failure of the system. She is denied adequate support. Her suffering is individualised rather than understood as a consequence of structural pressure.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ryan explains what survival requires of Callum: <p><i>“he has to go to their schools. He has to learn to play the game. He just has to be better at it, that’s all.” p.13</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reveals how marginalised groups are forced to work twice as hard for half the recognition.</li> <li>○ Success requires conformity to Cross norms.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>This links to Frantz Fanon’s concept of masking, where the oppressed must adopt the language, behaviour, and values of the dominant group to survive, often at the cost of identity and psychological wellbeing (<i>Black Skin, White Masks</i>).</p> <p>The play reflects this clearly: assimilation is not empowerment, but a survival strategy within an unequal system.</p>	<p>whose names carry no institutional protection, making them more vulnerable to punishment, exclusion, and surveillance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The play suggests that class and race determine whose pain is taken seriously and whose is ignored.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key Ideas the Play Communicates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Class systems maintain racial hierarchy.</li> <li>● Privilege creates distance from injustice.</li> <li>● Survival often requires masking and emotional labour.</li> <li>● Systems punish the poor while protecting the powerful.</li> </ul> <p>Class, like race, shapes who belongs, who is heard, and who is expendable.</p>		

## 6. Activism, Resistance and Rebellion Emerge Under Unequal Conditions

Noughts face discrimination, surveillance, and exclusion. When peaceful routes to change are blocked, resistance escalates. The play presents resistance not as a single unified response but as a spectrum shaped by unequal conditions.

**Key idea:** oppression does not only silence — it can radicalise.

The Liberation Militia represents **extremist resistance**.

### Features:

- Indoctrination
- Political violence
- Recruitment driven by anger and injustice

Moments such as the shopping-centre bombing and the arrest of Callum's father for political terrorism (p.47) highlight how the state responds forcefully to rebellion while often ignoring the structural conditions that produced it. The play therefore invites audiences to ask difficult questions about how injustice, exclusion, and lack of political voice can escalate resistance into rebellion, while making clear that understanding the roots of extremism is not the same as endorsing it.

The explosion marks a turning point where resistance escalates into public, indiscriminate violence, reinforcing the play's warning that when systemic injustice festers, rebellion can become destructive and uncontrollable - "*They run. There's a huge explosion*" (Dundale Centre) p.39.

### Callum's Role

Positioned between Cross and Nought worlds

### Real-World Context

Possible parallels: IRA, ANC (dismantle systems) - consider other extremist movements.

Understands resistance but rejects indiscriminate violence

Callum represents **critical resistance**, not extremism. However, there is a shift after his father dies, and Callum endorses the Militia. His character faces internal conflict: motivated by his father's death vs his desire for equality.

*"Sold my soul, lost it, for a lot of things, some good, some bad." p.60*

Cause and effect:

- Unequal Power → Political Resistance
- Systemic Oppression → Radicalisation
- Violent Resistance → Moral and Human Cost

Cause: The Liberation Militia use indiscriminate violence to challenge injustice.

Effect: Innocent lives are endangered, cycles of violence are reinforced, and resistance risks mirroring the oppression it seeks to destroy.

### Why Resistance Groups Exist

Resistance groups often emerge under conditions of sustained inequality, where peaceful and diplomatic routes to change are blocked or repeatedly ignored. When systems of power are designed to exclude certain groups, resistance can become a response to structural violence rather than a rejection of peace.

Historically, many resistance movements begin with **non-violent protest**. Nelson Mandela, for example, initially pursued peaceful methods inspired by figures such as Gandhi. However, under Apartheid South Africa, these approaches were met with state violence, imprisonment, and legal suppression. The absence of meaningful political representation and the criminalisation of protest forced a strategic shift. Armed struggle emerged not as a first choice, but as a response to the failure of peaceful reform within an unjust power structure.

This highlights a key tension: **diplomatic routes to change rely on the cooperation of those already in power**. Where power is unwilling to concede, progress becomes slow, fragile, or symbolic. For marginalised groups, the "long game" of reform can mean generations continue to suffer while waiting for change that may never arrive.

Like **Nelson Mandela's** early activism, *Noughts & Crosses* shows attempts to work within the system. Callum's father, Ryan, initially believes in survival through assimilation rather than rebellion, illustrating the belief that keeping one's head down may offer safety. However, he sees that this is futile, as the play repeatedly demonstrates the **limits of this approach**. Assimilation does not prevent humiliation, violence, or death.

Characters such as Jude are drawn towards the LM. Jude's radicalisation is not sudden; it is shaped by:

- violence
- lack of opportunity
- humiliation and anger
- the absence of hope within existing power structures

The play does not romanticise armed resistance, but it **explains why it becomes attractive** when the system leaves no space for justice.

## Microaggressions, Unconscious Bias and Cognitive Dissonance

These terms have become a key tool for dialogue when discussing the way that individuals perpetuate the structural and shared understanding of racism, and how racism persists. The terms attempt to name the ways in which collective ideas and ideology are transmitted by individuals to marginalised groups. It can be argued that each of these concepts are difficult to challenge, and whether they are important because they are 'small', not deliberate and part of one's upbringing and belief systems.

**“When I look at you, I don't see colour.” “There is only one race, the human race.” “All lives matter!”** *Denying the significance of racial/ethnic experience and history.*

### Microaggressions

Harvard psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce coined the term in 1970 to describe daily insults endured by African Americans. Psychologist Derald Wing expanded the definition to include other marginalised groups.

#### Key features:

- **Subtle & Cumulative:** usually covert forms of racism that on the surface appear insignificant, coupled with a forced agreement between recipient and microaggressor that they are not intended to be challenged.
- The relentless cumulation can cause significant psychological, emotional, or physical harm.
- **Unintentional?** The recipient of a microaggression may not initially

### Unconscious bias

The definition of unconscious bias is often coined in the following way:

*Unconscious bias is a term used to describe the associations that we hold, which, despite being outside our conscious awareness, can have a significant influence on our attitudes and behaviour. Regardless of how fair minded we believe ourselves to be, most people have some degree of unconscious bias. This means that we automatically respond to others (e.g. people from different racial or ethnic groups) in positive or negative ways. These associations are difficult to override, regardless of whether we recognise them to be wrong, because they are deeply ingrained into our*

### Cognitive dissonance

The mental discomfort one experiences when faced with contradicting beliefs and values is known as cognitive dissonance.

The brain experiences stress leading to justification of belief or a realisation that the belief (or value/attitude) will need to change.

#### Key features

- Forced compliance, effort expenditure (justifying a hard task), or receiving information that challenges core beliefs.

To eliminate this discomfort:

- People may change behaviour in order for their actions to align with

<p>realise that they have been racially slighted. In turn, it is argued that the microaggressor may also be unaware that they have caused offence; or they may have projected their perception of that person as a representation of their race and the constructs the micoragressor has absorbed. These exchanges are often masked in a ‘compliment’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Identity:</b> They target individuals based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other marginalised statuses.</li> </ul>	<p><i>thinking and emotions.</i> <b>Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research</b></p> <p><b>Is unconscious bias an excuse?</b></p> <p>There are implications that this could be seen as a ‘get out of jail’ card. We are all aware on a whole variety of levels that past experiences, upbringing, education, and values shape the way we see the world, and that we are conscious that we draw on these factors when we encounter new things that we need to assess. We are indeed able to articulate that thought process. When it comes to questions of racism, these faculties are abandoned and the shield of ‘unconscious bias’ and ‘ignorance’ are often the plea.</p>	<p>their beliefs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Convincing oneself that the inconsistency is not important.</li> <li>● Rationalise by adding new beliefs in order to justify the inconsistency</li> <li>● Avoidance: ignoring information that creates the dissonance.</li> <li>● Signs include: feelings of guilt, embarrassment, or shame over actions; persistent justification of decisions; or avoiding new information.</li> </ul> <p>The intensity of the dissonance depends on the importance of the beliefs and how contradictory they are.</p>
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**How do these concepts feature in *Noughts & Crosses*?**

From the outset, Blackman is primarily concerned with the systemic structures that catastrophically blight the lives of Noughts. She focuses on the state structures and the ‘buy in’ from Crosses in order to maintain their supremacy over society and the lives of Noughts.

There are very few actual interactions between Noughts and Crosses apart from Sephy and Callum, and later between Callum and Jackie. The characters are deliberately crafted to communicate their understanding of their society and position within it without having to moderate or be cautious about what others outside their race think. The questions come from within, so we see the McGregors arguing amongst themselves about ways of achieving equality and we then see the Hadleys doing the

same.

The inception of their childhood friendship is framed by an innocence that they can indeed be friends. This dissipates as the reality of the structural inequalities begin to impact both their lives.

**The interplay of microaggressions, unconscious bias and cognitive dissonance in Noughts and Crosses.**

*‘SEPHY: You passed that exam and it proved you’re exceptional and you deserve to be at Heathcroft, okay!?’ p.10*

This statement is problematic as the ‘paper cut’ hits Callum in the form of a compliment but with an astute observation of how Sephy really thinks of Noughts. She alludes to an inherent intelligence that Crosses are imbued with and that only Nought outliers can enter her world. This is a blatant and **complete microaggression.**

In order to offer this ‘compliment’ and ‘reassurance’ to Callum, Sephy’s bias must be at play. She is at a point where she is unable to, or reluctant to, recognise the biases that she holds and we see many examples of her deflecting and experiencing cognitive dissonance: she believes that Noughts deserve to be treated in the same way as Crosses, but this is sitting alongside a belief that they must pass muster and prove their worth.

The dissonance deepens when she cries, *‘You’re behaving like BLANKERS!’* p.20. She is mortified at her rebuke, expects to be forgiven by Callum and yet is unable to name where this has come from or how she is infected with generalised and racist beliefs about Noughts.

On p.22 she asks, *‘Why shouldn’t we be friends at our school?’* At this point the microaggression is embedded in her cognitive dissonance: schools should be for everyone and yet the best schools are reserved for Crosses and they are far from being at a stage where Callum can feel the way she claims to feel. Her

**Other examples to unpack**

*‘SEPHY: Callum, that’s great. I’m so proud! Carry on like that and you might be the first Nought to get to university!’ p.37*

*‘CALLUM: I’m not allowed in a Cross café. SEPHY: It’s all right, you’ll be with me.’ p.38*

\*\*\*\*\*

‘The equaliser’ microaggression

*‘You say your life’s bad, well, I can’t do anything I want to do either, you know!’ p.43*

\*\*\*\*\*

*‘JACKIE: I don’t really see us as being in charge, you know, my life isn’t exactly a walk in the park.*

*CALLUM: Tomorrow, though, you will be able to walk in the park, won’t you?’ p.79*

**Explorative questions**

1. How might microaggressions rob Noughts of their dignity?
2. How might Sephy’s comments link to her positioning within the power structure?

meltdown ensues and is influenced by her defensiveness and need to make it all about her. Her conflicting beliefs are causing great distress that becomes more important to her than the reality of Callum's lived experience.

Shania's assertion regarding Sephy's actions sums up the interplay of these concepts and the way Sephy diminishes the trauma inflicted on the Noughts as they tried to enter the school:

*'Shania: She just wants to feel special for sticking up for the underdog, then go back to her cosy little life of luxury [...] As if we don't know who her dad is. He despises us.'* p.25

Qualifying her thought by mentioning Kamal links Sephy's microaggression to the biases she has undoubtedly absorbed through her positioning as the daughter of the Home Secretary. Shania does not accept Sephy's dissonance, as in her mind, it is not possible to have such opposing stances.

3. How might we expand on Callum's responses in his words?
4. How is Sephy different from the other Crosses we encounter? How is she similar? Why?

## 5. Key Social, Historical and Literary Influences

The aim of this section is to provide some context to some of the underpinning historical events that Blackman may well have been thinking about as she wrote the original novel. There are a variety of examples she may have drawn from, and we can see the references to colonisation, slavery and the international pressure the Crosses are challenged with at government level to dismantle their obvious system of oppression. The focus here is on some key examples that resonate with events in the play, but it is recognised that there is so much more that further research of your own could draw out, including other literary influences.

### Apartheid South Africa

The system of apartheid emerged in 1948 from the aftermath of the horrors of World War II which resulted in the deaths of millions of people worldwide and the horrors of the Holocaust. And yet, this system of subjugating an entire race of people in their own country took until the 1990s to be dismantled and for Nelson Mandela to emerge as South Africa's first black prime minister.

When the African National Congress decided to move from peaceful resistance, their actions led to the imprisonment of many of their leaders including Nelson Mandela who served 27 years.

Apartheid was inspired by the systems put in place by the Nazis, namely the Nuremberg Laws and the Jim Crow Codes of the Southern states (America).



*Matt-80, A shanty town in Soweto, South Africa. Photograph. 2005.*

Black people were not allowed to live amongst white people, even though a key part of their function was to service white society. Townships were set up around cities and along with the introduction of identity cards, Black people existed under curfew, their living conditions a stark contrast to the Afrikaan ruling class.



*Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg, South Africa The Good News. 2008.*

## Soweto Uprisings

Everything in South African society was organised around the separation of the races and this included education. The imposition of Afrikaans being the principal form of curriculum delivery led mass protest from school and college students. The culmination of peaceful marches by school children in 1976 were met by tear gas and live bullets resulting in the death of between 3-8,000 children and adults.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission found that there were 21,000 deaths from political violence, with 7,000 deaths between 1948 and 1989, and 14,000 deaths and 22,000 injuries in the transition period between 1990 and 1994.



Sam Nzim, *Dzambukira, Proud*. November 5, 2006. *Remember, Remember the Fifth of November*. Harvard Computer Society.

## Segregation in America



Often titled **the Little Rock Nine**, a group of nine students became the first Black Americans to desegregate Little Rock Central High School in 1957. The children were met with opposition from the Arkansas governor and greeted by angry, violent mobs who gathered outside the school.

### Landmark ruling

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) deemed the central tenet of the 14th Amendment — “separate but equal” — to be unlawful.

## Separate but not equal

This principle was embedded in the Supreme Court's 1896 decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Plessy attempted to sit in a white-only section of a train, and the Court ruled that equal provision for Black and white passengers made segregation lawful.

## The NAACP

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People led efforts to ensure that Black students registered at white schools.<sup>1</sup> Implementation began three years after the 1954 ruling, with students selected on the basis of academic performance.

## Federal intervention

The National Guard had to be called in to protect the Black students, reinforced by an executive order from President Eisenhower compelling federal troops to assist in desegregating schools.



*Rowland Scherman, Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.*



*Uncredited DOJ photographer, restored by Adam Cuerden. 1960.*

## Ruby Bridges

In 1960, six-year-old Ruby Bridges was escorted by U.S. Marshals to attend the all-white William Frantz Elementary School in Louisiana during the New Orleans school desegregation crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Colo[u]red' is a historical term which is no longer considered appropriate

## Noughts & Crosses

The dismantling of segregation is directly re-enacted in the play and Malorie Blackman's novel. What we may now take for granted — that anyone can attend any school — was met with violence and opposition from parents, students, and teachers, and took many years to implement.

## Role of Education in Sustaining Inequality

Educational systems are often central to maintaining unequal power structures. Under Apartheid, Black South Africans were denied education beyond the age of 13, taught in segregated schools with inferior funding, resources, and facilities. This ensured a workforce trained for labour rather than leadership, reinforcing racial hierarchy.

Similar patterns can be traced in other contexts. In England, for example, the classification of some pupils as “**educationally subnormal**” disproportionately affected working-class and racially marginalised children, limiting their access to academic pathways and social mobility. Such structures do not merely reflect inequality — they actively reproduce it.

Education is one of the clearest ways inequality is maintained in the play. Callum's presence at Heathcroft School — a Cross-dominated school — exposes how **educational spaces reproduce power** rather than challenge it.

- Nought students are marginalised, surveilled, and treated as inferior.
- Callum is constantly reminded that he does not belong.
- The curriculum, expectations, and authority figures reinforce Cross superiority.

This **mirrors Apartheid-era South Africa**, where education prepared Black students for labour, not leadership. The play suggests that denying fair education is not accidental — it is a deliberate strategy to maintain hierarchy.

This also resonates with the English context, where racially marginalised and working-class students were historically labelled “**educationally subnormal**”, restricting access to opportunity and reinforcing inequality under the guise of ability.

*“I know you mean well, yeah, but no Nought should have to be exceptional to get the same as average Crosses though, should they, Sephy” p.10*

When education is restricted or weaponised, resistance becomes more likely. Denial of knowledge, opportunity, and voice creates conditions in which activism, rebellion, or armed struggle may be seen as the only remaining means of asserting dignity and humanity.

## The Bristol Bus Boycott

The Bristol Bus Boycott is a significant event in the history of the fight for civil rights. It is often assumed that the kinds of discrimination that was occurring in countries like South Africa and America is unique to them and we are more familiar with their champions and heroes.

However, the 1960s saw Britain experiencing its own forms of discrimination as the Windrush generation attempted to settle in the country, especially in places outside London, such as Bristol.

It is well documented how Caribbeans worked within the London Transport industry and, whilst it was not without issue, many were able to secure frontline posts as bus drivers and conductors.



<https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/civil-rights-movement/the-bristol-bus-boycott-of-1963/>

### The backstory

The story in Bristol unfolds differently as the transport Bristol Omnibus Company was a distinct entity and imposed a 'colour bar' in the 1950s. Local legislation covertly endorsed the colour bar and unions ignored its illegality because of the strength of feeling.



*Figure 1 A peaceful group of protesters were followed by many police officers. Catalogue reference: MEPO 31/21. © Metropolitan Police Service.*

Caribbeans would apply for jobs and be routinely turned down, although they were allowed to work in more menial roles.

A key reason for not supporting the employment of Black and Asian people was expressed by General Manager Ian Patey, claiming that:

***“You won’t get a white man to admit it, but which of them will join a service where they may find themselves working under a coloured foreman?”<sup>1</sup>***

He also claimed that the influx of immigrants threatened to drive down wages and that they would be willing to work at lower rates, as well as reducing the opportunities for overtime for white workers.

## Discrimination across the board

Bristol's Caribbean population was only around 3,000 by 1963 with the bulk of that population congregating around the area of St Pauls. They found it near impossible to find decent and adequate housing due to racism and were forced to live in derelict accommodation. Many white people refused to rent to them and for those who did, it could lead to white families leaving the area, affecting house prices.

Increasingly, the Caribbean community found it necessary to create institutions that represented and advocated for the discrimination they were experiencing. Through setting up their own churches and community organisations, activism work sprung forth. Support from the wider community through the press exposed the bus company's policy.

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<sup>1</sup> 'coloured' is a historical term which is no longer considered appropriate



<https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/civil-rights-movement/the-bristol-bus-boycott-of-1963/>

The West Indian Development Council was formed and led by Roy Hackett, Owen Henry, Audley Evans and Prince Brown. Paul Stephenson became the face of the Boycott. He exposed the policy by organising for a Black individual to apply for an available post, exposing how the interview was cancelled once it became known that the applicant was Black.

Mirroring the boycott in America, Bristolians, including white people, decided to adopt this form of protest. This involved all those taking part desisting from using the bus services, choosing to walk and share car journeys instead.

## Impact

The boycott garnered support nationally and worldwide and finally ended in August 1963. By September, the first person from the global majority was appointed, followed by three more.

Whilst there were marches and protests leading to clashes with the police, the Boycott was the key strategy that led to the dismantling of the discrimination within the bus company. Through gaining traction through media coverage and government support, many other areas of life as an immigrant were highlighted, including housing and employment in other areas. This led to the Race Relations Act of 1965 and 1968 which helped to enshrine in law the rights of Black people. The first Act focused on racial discrimination in public places, with the 1968 law focusing on both housing and employment.

Stephenson, Bailey and Hackett received OBEs in 2009 for their pivotal roles. In 2013 the General Workers Union issued a formal apology.

## Stephen Lawrence



Photograph of Stephen Lawrence.  
Press Association.

The murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 and the subsequent investigation, remains one of the most egregious murder cases in UK history. His murder sparked debate into whether it was indeed a racially motivated attack which influenced the conduct of the police investigation. The lack of initial first aid, and the profiling of a dying Stephen and his friend Duwayne Brooks, formed a catalogue of sabotage that ultimately meant that the five suspects remained free until 2012, when only two of them were finally convicted of his murder. His parents campaigned tirelessly to expose the racism that marred the investigation and shielded the suspects; in 2013 Doreen Lawrence became a Baroness, joining the House of Lords specialising in Race and Diversity. The Macpherson report published in 1999 highlighted the many flaws in the investigation and commented on the lack of institutional reflection following on from the Scarman report in response to the Brixton Riots of 1981. Significantly, the report deemed the Metropolitan and Kent Police to be institutionally racist and made a number of recommendations that pointed to major issues in other institutions such as education.

What resonated most as the years went on and the killers remained free, was the injustice and quiet dignity of the family. The private prosecution ended in the acquittal of two of the suspects, sparking public outrage and a national newspaper publishing the photographs and the names of all five suspects under the headline: 'Murderers.' The paper invited the suspects to sue. The case garnered great public support, but much of the evidence had been compromised, lost or concealed, and an entire community banded together in silence out of fear, but also due to blatant racism and Stephen's life not being seen as of value.

*Reading into this case will help you to understand more about Blackman's motivation for writing Noughts & Crosses. She does not attempt to mirror the event of Stephen's murder, but rather uses the circumstances and context to build a narrative centring the way that injustice supports the representation of the powerful in society and the toxicity of racism leading to shocking injustice.*



Original publication: Daily Mail (14 February 1997)

## Literary Influences

<p><i>Noughts &amp; Crosses</i> uses allegory, speculative fiction, and dystopian conventions to expose how power operates systemically, showing that injustice is not caused by hatred alone, but by laws, institutions, and social norms, and asks whether love or morality can survive within such a system.</p>		
<p><b>Allegory</b> to expose injustice</p>	<p><b>Speculative fiction</b> to make power structures visible</p>	<p><b>Dystopian conventions</b> to question authority, law, and morality</p>
<p><b>What allegory means</b>            An <b>allegory</b> is a narrative where characters, events, or settings symbolise real-world ideas or systems. Rather than representing reality directly, it <i>stands in</i> for it, allowing writers to explore injustice at a slight remove.</p> <p><b>How it operates in <i>Noughts &amp; Crosses</i></b>            Malorie Blackman uses the Cross–Nought power reversal as an allegory for racial oppression. By positioning Crosses (Black people) as the ruling class and Noughts (white people) as the oppressed, the play exposes how injustice is <b>structural, normalised,</b></p>	<p><b>What speculative fiction means</b>  <b>Speculative fiction</b> imagines a world that is different from ours in order to reveal truths about how power operates. It asks: <i>What if society worked this way instead?</i></p> <p><b>How it works in the play</b>  <i>Noughts &amp; Crosses</i> is speculative because it rewrites history and social hierarchies. This is not fantasy for escapism — it is a <b>thought experiment</b> designed to expose power.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laws, language, education, and policing all privilege Crosses.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What dystopia means</b>            A <b>dystopia</b> presents a society where control, injustice, and inequality are normalised, often justified as necessary for “order” or “security.”</p> <p><b>Dystopian features in <i>Noughts &amp; Crosses</i></b>            The play uses dystopian conventions to interrogate whether laws are the same as justice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Authoritarian control:</b> Heavy policing of Nought communities; disproportionate punishment.</li> </ul>

<p><b>and enforced by institutions</b>, not just individual prejudice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination against Noughts mirrors real-world racism without replicating it directly.</li> <li>• Everyday humiliations (school segregation, policing, employment barriers) feel shocking precisely because the audience recognises their logic.</li> <li>• The allegory forces audiences — particularly those who benefit from power — to confront how oppression feels when roles are reversed.</li> </ul> <p><b>Why it matters dramatically</b> The allegory creates discomfort without defensiveness. Audiences cannot dismiss injustice as “historical” or “someone else’s problem” because the system is recognisable, but unfamiliar.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Racism is embedded in systems rather than framed as personal cruelty.</li> <li>• Seemingly “neutral” rules are shown to have unequal outcomes.</li> </ul> <p>By exaggerating and flipping power structures, Blackman makes the <i>invisible visible</i>. Things that are often ignored in real life — institutional bias, generational trauma, internalised inferiority — become unavoidable.</p> <p><b>Why it is effective for young audiences</b> Students can analyse systems <i>without feeling personally accused</i>. The distance created by speculation invites critical thinking rather than shutdown.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Propaganda and fear:</b> Militant groups and “terror threats” are used to justify brutality.</li> <li>• <b>Moral distortion:</b> Acts of resistance are labelled as terrorism, while state violence is legal.</li> </ul> <p>Through this, the play asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who decides what is lawful?</li> <li>• When does obedience become complicity?</li> <li>• Is rebellion immoral if the system itself is unjust?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dramatic tension</b> The audience is constantly forced to weigh <b>order vs justice</b>, especially through characters who are trying to survive rather than rebel.</p>		

## Literary Comparisons

<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	<i>West Side Story</i>	<i>Across the Barricades</i>
<p><b>Shared ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Forbidden love across entrenched social divisions.</li> <li>● Young people trapped by systems created by adults.</li> <li>● Love cannot survive in a world structured by hatred.</li> </ul> <p><b>Key difference</b></p> <p>In <i>Noughts &amp; Crosses</i>, the conflict is not a family feud but a <b>state-sanctioned hierarchy</b>. This makes the tragedy feel more political and less accidental.</p>	<p><b>Shared ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Love across divided communities/ethnicity.</li> <li>● Violence bred by identity, loyalty, and fear.</li> <li>● Inheriting conflicts they did not create.</li> </ul> <p><b>Key difference</b></p> <p><i>West Side Story</i> frames conflict as communal rivalry, whereas <i>Noughts &amp; Crosses</i> foregrounds <b>institutional power</b>. One group has authority, legitimacy, and weapons — the other does not.</p>	<p><b>Shared ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Forbidden love across divides</li> <li>● Hatred destroying Sadie and Kevin’s love.</li> </ul> <p><b>Key difference</b></p> <p>A civil war between Catholics and Protestants with one side wanting autonomy from Britain, and the other wishing to remain. <i>Across the Barricades</i> is about love in the frame of sectarianism and religious divides.</p>
<p>The reversal of racial power is a <b>tool for recognition</b>, not equivalence.</p>		

## 6. Teaching for Depth: Context, Knowledge and Interpretation

### Intentional and Informed Teaching Through the Use of Critical Concepts\*

\*Critical concepts are **analytical lenses** that help us examine systems, representations, and behaviours in order to uncover hidden assumptions, power structures, and perspective. These concepts clearly are under the umbrella of power, representation and race, as well as linking in with the core principles.

These concepts should be **named, taught, and revisited** throughout the study:

Critical concept	Examples in play	Historical/contemporary
<b>Racism vs Prejudice</b>	<p>Kamal uses his power to commute Ryan's death sentence and he uses it to blackmail Callum and Sephy, resulting in Callum's execution.</p> <p>If power is what maintains racial hierarchy, then we see the way in which the Noughts feel about the Crosses as prejudice. The term 'blankers' carries the full weight of institutional racism. Whereas, the Nought's use of the term 'dagger' should be viewed as 'prejudice', and not understood to be 'reverse' racism.</p>	Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison for resisting Apartheid

<b>Institutional racism</b>	<p>Throughout the play there are TV reports that constantly frame news from a Cross perspective. Kamal's views are reinforced by government systems and sanction The school system - Nought education is inferior as Callum will join Sephy's Year even though he is older.</p>	<p>Stephen Lawrence case and the consequent Macpherson report pointing to institutional bias within the police.</p>
<b>Indoctrination and assimilation</b>	<p>Meggie accuses Ryan and Jude of being 'brainwashed' after the bombing at the Dundale p.41</p> <p>At Heathcroft, it is clear that the students are influenced by the media and their positioning in society. The integration of Noughts to Cross schools is under the proviso that they accept Cross ideology.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Nazi Germany and Nazism</li> <li>● Racial Narratives e.g. eugenics</li> <li>● antisemitism</li> <li>● supremacy of one race over others</li> <li>● Islamophobia</li> <li>● extreme ideologies</li> </ul>
<b>Complicity and silence</b>	<p>Andrew is employed by Kamal to infiltrate the LM p.17 Sephy is caught between enjoying the privileges of her life as a Cross at the expense of the subjugation of Noughts.</p>	<p>How entire societies buy in to the subjugation of groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Colonialism</li> <li>● Slavery</li> <li>● Segregation and apartheid</li> </ul>
<b>Resistance vs rebellion/terrorism?</b>	<p>The LM is set up to challenge and change the way that society is set up against the Noughts. Ryan argues that Callum going to Heathcroft is a way of resisting within the system and Callum thinks this too. Jude's view is that non-violent protest has run its course and that the LM is the only way forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● South Africa - ANC and their move to an armed struggle</li> <li>● The setting up of Black Saturday schools to combat racism in education in UK</li> <li>● Gandhi - Satyagraha - peaceful resistance</li> <li>● Martin Luther King and Civil Rights</li> </ul>

<p><b>The burden of representation</b></p>	<p>The spotlight is on the small group of Noughts integrating into Cross schools. They will either be perceived as an exception to the rule or, if they are unsuccessful, they represent the prevailing view of Noughts as inferior and even feral.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stephen Lawrence’s murder investigation and press coverage was initially sabotaged by harmful racial assumptions.</li> <li>● In many ways, the fact that it became evident that he had the aptitude to pursue an architectural career and the respectability of his family became a hallmark in the support for justice.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The danger of treating groups as monoliths</b></p>	<p>The dehumanisation of ‘daggers’ and ‘blankers’ - Jude does not see the ‘daggers’ as individuals but rather as an ideology that all Crosses are signed up to.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lynchings in the US – false assumption of Black men being predators and a danger to specifically white women</li> <li>● Media narrative of implying that ‘all Muslims are terrorists’</li> </ul>

## Managing Discussion and Drama Activities

Structuring Classroom Discussion (Safe, Guided, Power-Aware)	Specific Example	Drama-Specific Guidance (Where Applicable)
<p>Rather than open debate, teachers should use <b>guided enquiry</b> such as:</p> <p>Short introduction: explaining that these are suggested points of discussion to have in the classroom. Could be used as group discussion, whole class, or paired conversations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How does the state maintain control over the Noughts?</li> <li>● What would this look like in the classroom / studio?</li> <li>● What choices are available to characters and which are denied?</li> <li>● How does love operate within an unequal system of power?</li> <li>● What does the play suggest about silence, safety, and responsibility?</li> </ul>	<p>Read over pp.19-21 from “<i>A group of PROTESTORS outside the school</i>” (read the top of p.19 later)</p> <p><b>Key Question: How does the state use the Crosses to maintain control over the Noughts?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Who are the protestors?</li> <li>● Why are they there?</li> <li>● Why do they feel like this and where did they get these feelings and convictions from?</li> <li>● How do the protestors want the children entering the school to feel?</li> <li>● What are we the audience faced with? How do we feel?</li> <li>● What does Sephy’s outburst tell us about the impact of what she heard from her dad (top of p.19) and what society has taught her to</li> </ul>	<p>When teaching the play in Drama contexts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Avoid forcing students to “perform” oppression or trauma</li> <li>● Use <b>distancing techniques</b>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Narration</li> <li>○ Chorus</li> <li>○ Freeze-frames</li> <li>○ Thought-tracking</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Frame role-play analytically, not emotionally exploitative</li> <li>● Intervene when improvisation risks reinforcing stereotypes or harm</li> </ul> <p>Drama should be used to <b>examine systems</b>, not simulate suffering.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How are individuals shaped and limited by the systems they live within?</li></ul> <p>This approach protects students from being positioned as representatives or spokespersons.</p>	<p>think about herself and the way Noughts are characterised?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Through Sephy and Callum, how is the state able to create a rift, in their friendship?</li></ul> <p>These prompts could be used to shape the feedback to the key question, and this could be compared, or added to, by other groups as you take feedback and come to an agreed consensus.</p>	
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## Extract Examples

### COLONIALISM & LEGACY

#### Scene focus: pp.66-67 - Callum and Sephy in captivity debate power, history and change

Systems of power are built over time through conquest, control of resources, and inherited advantage. The exchange in this scene reveals how historical violence shapes present-day inequality, influencing who holds wealth, opportunity, and voice. Callum challenges the idea that Cross power was gained “respectfully,” while Sephy begins to recognise that Cross status and wealth were built through violence, exploitation, and land control. She understands that inequality persists because institutions continue to favour the dominant group. This mirrors real-world colonial histories, where empires gained power through invasion, resource extraction, and enforced hierarchy, leaving legacies that still shape society today.

Power	Representation	Race
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Power is accumulated historically and defended structurally.</li> <li>● Sephy recognises inherited privilege: <i>“We have the riches, the control of resources, the opportunities, the land, the property”</i></li> <li>● Callum emphasises that peaceful appeals have failed to change the system.</li> <li>● The debate shows two responses to inequality:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reform from within</li> <li>○ Resistance against the system</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Power operates through:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Control of land and resources</li> <li>○ Political influence</li> <li>○ Economic advantage</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Callum and Sephy are representations of the lives that Noughts and Crosses lead. Their perspectives are influenced by how they see history and the present. They show how your position defines you.</p> <p><u>Sephy:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hope for a shared future</li> <li>● Education, reform, peaceful change</li> <li>● Learning as preparation for action</li> </ul> <p><u>Callum:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Direct action and resistance</li> </ul>	<p>Inequality is not accidental; it is structured and reproduced over time.</p> <p>Sephy acknowledges that Crosses benefit from systems designed in their favour. She begins to understand that individual kindness does not erase structural inequality.</p> <p>Callum highlights how long marginalised groups have attempted peaceful change without success.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ability to maintain the status quo</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Key question:</u> How might Sephy’s realisation mirror someone learning about historical colonial systems for the first time?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Action is necessary for change</li> <li>● Frustration with slow progress</li> </ul> <p>Both recognise inequality; they disagree on how change happens.</p> <p><b><u>Key questions:</u> Is learning enough to create change?</b></p> <p><b>When does action become necessary?</b></p>	<p>Inherited advantage means benefiting from systems created before you were born.</p> <p><b><u>Key question:</u> Can someone benefit from a system even if they did not create it?</b></p>
<p><b>KEY QUOTATIONS</b></p> <p><i>‘With tea and cake and no bloodshed?’</i></p> <p><i>‘[H]ow can anyone compete?’</i></p> <p><i>‘Noughts have been trying to work peacefully [...] for decades.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Truly seeing how things have been set up by us to favour us, and we have used every awful thing available to keep it this way. We have the riches, the control of resources, the opportunities, the land, the property’</i></p>		<p><b>CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How does the scene suggest that power has a history?</li> <li>2. What does Sephy learn about legacy and privilege?</li> <li>3. Why does Callum believe peaceful change is not enough?</li> <li>4. How does the play mirror real-world histories of colonialism and inequality?</li> <li>5. What responsibilities come with recognising inherited advantage?</li> </ol>

**Scene focus: pp.79-80 - Callum's Final Conversation (Pre-Execution)**

This late-play scene stages a quiet conversation between Callum (a Nought facing execution) and Jackie (a Cross prison guard). It juxtaposes intimacy and state violence, allowing audiences to interrogate how power, race and representation operate structurally rather than just through individual prejudice.

This scene exposes how racialised systems of power operate beyond individual intentions, contrasting resignation to injustice with a radical vision of shared, accountable power. Through intimate dialogue and stark staging, the audience is positioned to witness the human cost of structural inequality.

Power	Representation	Race
<p>Institutional power:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The state controls life and death. Orders come 'from the top'; visitors are denied; the execution proceeds despite public doubt.</li> <li>• → Demonstrates how systems override individual morality.</li> </ul> <p>Interpersonal power:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jackie holds situational authority over Callum but lacks real decision-making power.</li> <li>• → Highlights the difference between holding authority and controlling outcomes.</li> </ul> <p>Reimagining power:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Callum envisions shared, accountable power without oppression.</li> <li>• → Suggests power could be collaborative rather than hierarchical.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Callum</u>: Represents hope, resistance and ideological clarity despite a lack of power.</p> <p><u>Jackie</u>: Represents sympathetic complicity—kind but unable to challenge the system.</p> <p><u>Sephy (silent presence)</u>: Embodies emotional truth and generational consequence.</p> <p>Staging: Mirrored seating of families visually reinforces division and cyclical injustice.</p> <p>Representation raises questions about:</p>	<p>The racial hierarchy determines who is most vulnerable to state violence. Callum invites Jackie to imagine a reversed system → exposes race as socially constructed and maintained. Jackie's 'power corrupts' argument reflects colour-blind ideology, suggesting oppression is inevitable. The execution reveals how racialised systems shape justice and the value of life.</p> <p>Race in this scene functions as:</p>

<p>Power exists on three levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural (law, state, and institutions)</li> <li>• Social (Cross vs Nought hierarchy)</li> <li>• Personal (relationships and empathy)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whose perspectives are centred?</li> <li>• Who is allowed to act?</li> <li>• Who is remembered?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A structural hierarchy</li> <li>• A determinant of justice</li> <li>• A factor shaping whose voice matters</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key quotations to explore</b></p> <p><i>'Do you ever wonder what it would be like if our situations were reversed?'</i></p> <p><i>'Power corrupts.'</i></p> <p><i>'We can change what power means.'</i></p> <p><i>'[O]rders were from the top.'</i></p>		<p><b>Exploration questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What forms of power are visible in this scene? Who holds them?</li> <li>• How does the conversation challenge or reinforce ideas about race and justice?</li> <li>• Is Jackie powerless or complicit? Can both be true?</li> <li>• What does Callum's vision of shared power suggest about the play's message?</li> <li>• How does the staging reinforce themes of division and inequality?</li> <li>• Why might the playwright place this ideological debate immediately before the execution?</li> </ul>

## Critical Thinking and Discussion Questions

Reread any of the core principles and consider how the following questions could be used to rehearse ideas for your own understanding or to form the basis of a student focused activity / discussion.

1. History is Shaped by Those in Power	2. Racism Functions Structurally and Emotionally	3. Representation Carries Weight and Consequence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If 'history is written by the victors', whose stories might be missing in the world of the play? Why?</li> <li>• How does control of education shape what characters believe to be true?</li> <li>• In what ways is rewriting history a form of resistance?</li> <li>• How does Callum's comment about crossing out the history books reveal frustration with institutional power?</li> <li>• What parallels can be drawn between the play and real-world debates about whose histories are taught?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the play show the difference between <i>feeling opposed to racism</i> and <i>actively challenging racist systems</i>?</li> <li>• How does Sephy's emotional pain coexist with her structural privilege?</li> <li>• Why might Sephy see the Liberation Militia as a threat rather than as a protest?</li> <li>• How do Ryan and Jude's experiences demonstrate racism as systemic rather than individual?</li> <li>• Does the play suggest that love across racial divides is enough to challenge inequality? Why or why not?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do small moments of exclusion (like Shania's comment about plasters) reveal larger systems of inequality?</li> <li>• How does Callum's description of '<i>finding it hard to breathe</i>' communicate the pressure of living within the system?</li> <li>• Who is represented as 'normal' in the world of the play, and who is not?</li> <li>• How does representation influence how characters see themselves and each other?</li> <li>• Why might representation be considered a form of power?</li> <li>• In what ways does the play suggest that being unseen or misrepresented has real consequences?</li> </ul>

4. Marginalised Groups are Not Monolithic	5. Class Systems Shape Power and Belonging	6. Activism, Resistance, and Rebellion Emerge Under Unequal Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How does the play challenge stereotypes about Noughts?</li> <li>● In what ways do Ryan, Meggie, and Callum respond differently to inequality?</li> <li>● Why might dominant groups benefit from portraying marginalised communities as monolithic?</li> <li>● How does Callum resist being tokenised at Heathcroft?</li> <li>● What tensions exist within the McGregor family about how to survive or resist the system?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How does class deepen racial inequality in the play?</li> <li>● In what ways do Sephy and Callum’s class positions shape their choices and safety?</li> <li>● How does political power protect characters like Kamal from confronting injustice?</li> <li>● What does Ryan’s idea of ‘playing the game’ reveal about assimilation and survival?</li> <li>● How does Fanon’s idea of masking help us understand Callum’s experience?</li> <li>● Why is Lynette denied support, and what does this suggest about class and care?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What conditions in the play lead some characters to protest peacefully while others turn to more extreme forms of resistance?</li> <li>● How does inequality shape the <b>methods</b> of resistance available to different groups?</li> <li>● Why might groups who lack political power feel that peaceful or diplomatic routes are ineffective?</li> <li>● How does the play encourage us to understand the difference between <b>explaining</b> rebellion and <b>justifying</b> it?</li> <li>● In what ways do characters disagree about how change should be achieved? What does this reveal about power and strategy?</li> <li>● How do systems of inequality create pressure that can push individuals or groups toward activism or rebellion?</li> <li>● Who is labelled a ‘threat’ or ‘criminal’ in the play, and who has the power to apply those labels?</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Can meaningful change occur without disrupting existing power structures? Why or why not?</li><li>● How does the play invite audiences to consider the risks, motivations, and consequences of resistance movements?</li></ul>
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## 6. Further Guidance and Resources

### Further Reading

*Across the Barricades: A Kevin and Sadie Story* (2016) Joan Lingard. London: Penguin.

*Bandit Country: The IRA and South Armagh* (2024) Toby Harnden. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

*Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) Frantz Fanon. London: Pluto Press.

*Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (2020) Isabel Wilkerson. London: Allen Lane.

*Cry Freedom: The Legendary True Story of Steve Biko and the Friendship that Defied Apartheid* (1987) Donald Woods. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

*Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (2023 edn.) Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, Mary R. Gardner and Isabel Wilkerson. London: Penguin.

*History of South Africa: A Captivating Guide to Its Colonial Past, Military Conflicts, Apartheid, and Post-1994 South Africa* (2025) Captivating History.

*Kaffir Boy* (1986) Mark Mathabane. New York: Free Press.

*Leave Taking: The GCSE Study Guide* Lynette Carr Armstrong and Samantha Wharton.

*Lies About Black People: How to Combat Racist Stereotypes and Why It Matters* (2023) Keon West. London: Blink Publishing.

*Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (1994) Nelson Mandela. London: Little, Brown.

*Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire* (2018) Akala. London: Two Roads.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) George Orwell. London: Secker & Warburg.

***Noughts & Crosses***: (2017) Malorie Blackman. London: Penguin.

***Noughts & Crosses Collection: 6-Book Set*** (2019) Malorie Blackman. London: Penguin.  
Includes: *Noughts & Crosses*, *Knife Edge*, *Checkmate*, *Double Cross*, *Crossfire* and *Endgame*.

***Steve and Me*** (2024) Duwayne Brooks. London: Ebury Press.

***The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colourblindness*** (2012) Michelle Alexander. New York: The New Press.

## Further Viewing

- **Noughts + Crosses** (BBC i-Player) – A direct screen adaptation of Malorie Blackman’s novel. Useful for exploring how dystopian segregation, power and resistance are visualised on screen and how adaptation choices shape interpretation.
- **Subnormal** (2021) – Examines the education system in Britain and the experiences of Black students placed in “subnormal” schools. Powerful context for discussions of structural racism in education and institutional decision-making.
- **Small Axe – BBC anthology** by Steve McQueen exploring Black British life, resistance and community:
  - *Mangrove* – Police harassment, protest and collective resistance.
  - *Lovers Rock* – Joy, identity and community spaces.
  - *Red, White and Blue* – Policing, power and internal conflict.
  - *Alex Wheatle* – Identity, belonging and political awakening.
  - *Education* – Schooling, mis-labelling and systemic inequality.  
Particularly useful for linking real historical contexts to the structural inequalities imagined in *Noughts & Crosses*.
- **Loving** (2016) – The true story of an interracial couple challenging anti-miscegenation laws in the United States. Supports exploration of forbidden relationships, law, and how societies regulate love and identity.

- **Till** – Focuses on the murder of Emmett Till and his mother’s pursuit of justice. Useful for discussions of racial violence, grief, activism and the role of public testimony in challenging injustice.
- **Uprising, Series 1: Fire** – Examines the 1981 New Cross Fire and the Black People’s Day of Action. Supports understanding of protest, media representation and community response to injustice in Britain.

### **Websites for Further Research** *[accessed 27 April 2026]*

- **NAACP Legal Defense Fund — Brown v. Board of Education and the Doll Test**  
<https://www.naacpldf.org/brown-vs-board/significance-doll-test/>  
 Explores the psychological impact of segregation on children and the landmark US school desegregation case. Useful when discussing how systems shape identity and self-perception.
- **BFI — Review of *Uprising* and the legacy of the 1981 New Cross Fire**  
<https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound/reviews/uprising-looks-back-trauma-fury-stoked-1981-new-cross-fire>  
 Provides historical and cultural context for the New Cross Fire and its aftermath, supporting discussions of protest, media narratives and community activism.
- **Mental Health Foundation — Black mental health and resilience**  
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/blogs/black-mental-health-and-resilience>  
 Offers insight into the impact of racism on mental health and the importance of resilience and support. Useful for exploring character motivation, trauma and emotional context in the play.

**Further Exploration of the Context** [accessed 27 April 2026]

<p><b>Apartheid in South Africa</b></p>	<p><b>Segregation in the United States (Jim Crow &amp; Civil Rights)</b></p>	<p><b>Murder of Stephen Lawrence (UK)</b></p>
<p><b>BBC - Apartheid in South Africa</b>  <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0160mtw">https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0160mtw</a></p> <p><b>South African History Online</b>  <a href="http://sahistory.org.za">sahistory.org.za</a></p> <p><b>Apartheid Museum (Johannesburg)</b>  <a href="https://www.apartheidmuseum.org/exhibitions/apartheid">https://www.apartheidmuseum.org/exhibitions/apartheid</a></p>	<p><b>National Geographic – Segregation</b>  <a href="https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/supreme-court-outlaws-racial-segregation-us-schools/">https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/supreme-court-outlaws-racial-segregation-us-schools/</a></p> <p><b>National Museum of African American History and Culture</b>  <a href="https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/search?keyword=jim+crow">https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/search?keyword=jim+crow</a></p> <p><b>History.com – Segregation</b>  <a href="https://www.history.co.uk/history-of-america/racial-segregation">https://www.history.co.uk/history-of-america/racial-segregation</a></p>	<p><b>BBC News – Stephen Lawrence timeline</b>  <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26465916">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26465916</a></p> <p><b>The Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation</b>  <a href="https://stephenlawrenceday.org">https://stephenlawrenceday.org</a></p> <p><b>The Crown Prosecution Service – 30 years on</b>  <a href="https://www.cps.gov.uk/stories/remembering-stephen-lawrence">https://www.cps.gov.uk/stories/remembering-stephen-lawrence</a></p>

## Resources to Explore the Context

### Activity for Contextual Information about Apartheid South Africa

Apartheid South Africa	The Soweto Uprising (1976)	<i>Noughts &amp; Crosses</i> Influences
<p>Under apartheid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● People were classified by race.</li> <li>● Black South Africans were denied political power.</li> <li>● Interracial relationships were illegal.</li> <li>● Education, housing and public spaces were segregated.</li> <li>● Pass laws restricted movement.</li> <li>● Resistance movements were criminalised.</li> </ul>	<p>The Soweto Uprising began as a student protest against enforced Afrikaans-language education.</p> <p>Police opened fire on protesting schoolchildren.</p> <p>The event became a turning point in resistance to Apartheid and exposed the regime’s brutality to the world.</p>	<p>Look at the following scenes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. School integration scenes</li> <li>2. Callum’s arrest</li> <li>3. The Liberation Militia</li> <li>4. Interracial relationship conflict</li> </ol>

**Table to Complete with the Contextual Information about Apartheid South Africa**

<b>Apartheid Context</b>	<b>Evidence from the Play</b>	<b>What is Blackman Critiquing?</b>
Segregated education		
Criminalised resistance		
Interracial laws		
Police/state violence		
Pass laws / control		

## Activity for Contextual Information about US Segregation

### US Segregation

#### Understanding What Happened

1. **What event or action took place?**
2. **Who were the key people or groups involved?**
3. **What was the outcome or immediate response?**
4. **Why was this event significant at the time?**

#### Identifying the Ideology

5. **What belief or ideology is being supported in this event?**
  - For example: segregation, white supremacy, equality, civil rights.
6. **Was the event reinforcing segregation or challenging it?**
7. **What does the reaction of politicians, courts, or the public reveal about society at that time?**

#### Connecting to *Noughts & Crosses*

8. **How is this historical moment reflected in the story of *Noughts & Crosses*?**
9. **What similarities can you see between the reactions in history and the reactions in the novel / play?**

### Table to Complete with the Contextual Information about US Segregation

Event / Context	What happened?	What ideology or belief is being upheld or challenged?
<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> (1896)		
<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> (1954)		
The Little Rock Nine (1957)		
NAACP activism		
Federal intervention (Eisenhower)		
Ruby Bridges (1960)		
Connection to <i>Noughts &amp; Crosses</i>		

## Activity for Contextual Information about Stephen Lawrence

Stephen Lawrence case as a lens for analysing:

- Institutional racism
- Criminalisation of youth
- Media narratives
- The justice system
- Grief and radicalisation

**TASK:** read the Stephen Lawrence worksheet and highlight:

- Evidence of institutional racism
- Language used about Black youth
- Failures of justice
- Media portrayal
- Community response

**Table to Complete with the Contextual Information about Stephen Lawrence**

<b>Contextual Insight from Stephen Lawrence Case</b>	<b>What does this reveal about British society?</b>	<b>Where do we see a parallel in <i>Noughts &amp; Crosses</i>?</b>	<b>How does this deepen our understanding of character or theme?</b>	<b>What might Blackman be critiquing?</b>
Murder motivated by racism	Racism is not just prejudice but violent and systemic			
Police mishandling of investigation	Institutions fail racial minorities			
Macpherson Report: "institutional racism"	Racism embedded in systems, not just individuals			
Media portrayal of young Black men as threatening	Stereotyping influences public perception			
Grief of Stephen Lawrence's family	Personal trauma intertwined with political injustice			
Public activism and protest	Collective response to injustice			

## Activity and Table for Analysing Quotes in Relation to the Core Principles

Core principle	Quotation from play	Explanation/Commentary
<b><i>History is Shaped by Those in Power</i></b>	'I'll just cross out all the lies in the history books one by one over the next three years till it's one big sea of Biro and they have to rewrite them! <i>p.8 Callum</i>	
<b><i>Racism Functions Structurally and Emotionally</i></b>	'No, no, no to Noughts in our schools, GO GO GO back to your own! <i>p.19 Protestors</i>	
<b><i>Representation Carries Weight and Consequence</i></b>	'I'm just sorry they don't sell plasters in my skin tone, to be honest! <i>p.24 Shania</i>	
<b><i>Marginalised Groups are Not Monolithic</i></b>	'cos a wasted Nought's life's no big deal...' <i>p.16 Callum</i>	
<b><i>Class Systems Shape Power and Belonging</i></b>	'As long as Crosses run the schools - and everything else - we'll always be second-class nothings.' <i>p.13 Meggie</i>	
<b><i>Activism, Resistance, and Rebellion Emerge Under Unequal Conditions</i></b>	'It went wrong. We only wanted a way to a better world for our children, Meggie.' <i>p.41 Ryan</i>	

## Tips for exploring diverse texts

*Use these tips in part or in whole to guide how you plan and set up activities*

1. Have I created a safe and respectful environment where students are clear about acceptable and appropriate language?
2. Do I promote students having an ongoing interest and regard for other cultures outside their own?
3. Do I stimulate discussion through displays, props and opportunities to discuss other areas of the curriculum where they may have explored other cultures? *e.g. art, history, geography, sociology etc.*
4. Do students understand what racism is? Do I take opportunities to build on their understanding and point out differences between personal racism and the way society is structured to sometimes disadvantage people from other races and ethnicities?
5. Think about how you might like to introduce the text and the author/playwright. Be clear about their background and how this has informed their ideas for the plot and theme. Keep a balance and show

their literary and dramatic craft to ensure that they are firmly placed within the literary tradition/canon.

6. Ensure your own research places you in a position to debunk and develop students' understanding so that their ongoing discussions, analysis and performance is enriched, as they unpack themes and characters.
7. Introduce key terms early and agree with students how these terms will help them to understand the text such as **power, representation, race** and other words from the **glossary** in the **framework**.
8. Use the context section to make direct connections with the text and encourage students to dig deeper. Understanding the world around them as it is today, how it has changed, and events from the past that informs society today, is an important critical tool!
9. Do encourage students to explore why equality is important, that difference to one's 'norm' is fine and why racism is inherently wrong.
10. Take time to share with students what you have learned from the text and using the framework, tell them about it and make space for them to reflect on what they have learned.

## 8. Glossary of Useful Terms

Term	How these terms unfold in the play
Activism	Deliberate action taken to bring about social, political, or cultural change, often by challenging existing policies, practices, or power structures.
Allyship	The ongoing practice of using one’s position, resources, or influence to support and advocate for groups experiencing injustice or marginalisation.
Assimilation	The process by which individuals or groups are pressured or required to adopt the norms, values, and behaviours of a dominant culture, often at the expense of their own identity.
Authoritarian	Relating to a system or leadership style that concentrates power in a central authority and limits dissent, autonomy, or democratic participation.
Belonging	The sense of being accepted, valued, and recognised as part of a group, community, or society.
Bias	A preference or prejudice for, or against, a person or group that affects judgement, often unfairly.
Class	A social grouping based on economic position, occupation, education, and access to resources, often linked to differing levels of power and opportunity.
Complicity	Involvement in, or silent support of, injustice, whether through direct action, inaction, or benefiting from harmful systems.
Desegregation	The process of ending the separation of different racial or social groups in institutions such as schools, housing, or public spaces.
Dissident	A person who openly disagrees with or challenges an established authority, system, or

	set of beliefs, especially a government or dominant ideology.
Hierarchy	A system that ranks people or groups in relation to one another, often determining status, authority, and access to resources.
Ideology	A set of beliefs, values, or ideas that shape how individuals or societies understand the world, power, and social systems.
Indoctrination	The process of teaching a set of beliefs or ideas in a way that discourages questioning or critical examination.
Inequalities	Differences in access to opportunities, resources, or treatment that create unfair advantages for some groups and disadvantages for others.
Institutionalised racism	Patterns of policies, practices, or norms within institutions that produce unequal outcomes for different racial groups, regardless of individual intent.
Institutions	Established organisations and systems (e.g. schools, governments, and legal systems) that shape social behaviour, norms, and distribution of power.
Justice	Fair treatment and the idea that people should receive what is morally and legally right. It can refer to social, legal, or moral fairness.
Marginalised/marginalisation	Describing individuals or groups pushed to the edges of society, with limited access to power, representation, or resources.
Monolith	The mistaken treatment of a diverse group as if it were uniform, ignoring internal differences and complexity.
Power	The capacity to influence decisions, shape narratives, control resources, or determine outcomes for individuals or groups.
Prejudice	A preconceived judgement or attitude toward a person or group, often based on stereotypes rather than evidence or experience.

Privilege	Unearned advantages or protections afforded to certain groups based on social identity (e.g. race, class and gender), often experienced as normal by those who have them.
Race	A socially constructed system of categorising people based on perceived physical differences, historically used to justify unequal treatment and distribution of power.
Rebellion	Active resistance against authority, norms, or systems perceived as unjust.
Representation	The presence and portrayal of different groups in cultural, political, or social spaces, including who is visible, heard, and depicted.
Resistance	Actions or strategies used to oppose, challenge, or disrupt systems of power, control, or inequality.
Segregated	The enforced separation of groups of people, often by race, class, or ethnicity, within schools, communities, or public life.
Separatism	The belief or movement that a particular group should remain separate from others, often to preserve identity, culture, or safety.
Social Mobility	The ability for individuals or families to move up or down in social and economic status, often through education, employment, or wealth.
Status quo	The existing state of affairs, especially social or political arrangements that maintain current power structures.
Structural	Relating to the underlying systems, frameworks, and patterns that shape how society operates and distributes power and opportunity.
Supremacist	A person or ideology that believes one group (often racial) is superior to others and should dominate or control them.

# Appendix

## Timeline of Events

### Prologue

Flashback to Sephy and Callum as baby and toddler. Meggie worked for the Hadley's.

Fast forward (but still in flashback) - Callum and Sephy as older children and the point where Meggie is sacked because she does not corroborate Jasmine's lies.

### Act One

1. Anticipating Callum starting at Heathcroft - inequality - their first kiss
2. Double scene - Hadleys/McGregors
  - their homes - TV report - bomb LM and integration of schools announcement. Kamal's speech p.10
  - 'It's dad's policy' p.11 - Sephy's naive view compared to Jude's response p.10 'Blah, blah, blah' - Meggie's view on integration p.13 - Ryan's view on social mobility.
3. Shame p.13
4. Hint about Lynette's situation - mental health p.15
5. Sephy's monologue in tandem with Callum's
6. Kamal and Andrew - his political views - racism - tokenism - spying - traitors - Sephy and her response to 'blankers' pp.18-19
7. The school protest as Callum/Noughts arrive p.19 Sephy's outburst / display of her own racism
8. Home response - Callum
9. Later at the beach with Sephy
10. P.22 at the McGregors First sign that Jude is in LM p.23 - Meggie expresses non-violent approach
11. School canteen where Sephy tries to join Callum + Noughts - Intervention of Mr Bowden pp.23-25
12. Sephy & Callum's thoughts - foreshadowing
13. Simultaneous scene - attack from Dionne and Lola in Sephy/fight and argument Callum and Jude - stopped by Mr Bowden/Ryan - also discover what happened three years prior to Lynette p.28

14. Attempts to visit Sephy - Jasmine intervenes
15. Callum's final exchange with Lynette
16. Jasmine and Sephy p.30 Jasmine's drink problem - Callum at window - Jasmine argues with Kamal - break up Minerva challenging Sephy's naivety.
17. Ryan on violence p.33 'no change at all happens without violence' - Callum discovers Lynette Letter and disappearance - Police inform of Lynette's death
18. Jasmine's overdose
19. Callum reads Lynette's final letter
20. Time passes Update in soliloquy from Sephy and then Callum - Callum and Sephy speak on phone and arrange to meet at Cuckoo Cafe - Jude tries to stop Callum leaving for the Dundale shopping centre - Callum realises Sephy is in danger - Bomb - saves Sephy p.40
21. Sephy starts drinking - news updates with Casualties/ Kamal's pledge
22. McGregors - Jude confesses Meggie accuses them of being brainwashed - Jude and Ryan leave p.42
23. Continuing to drink - Sephy - meets Callum drunk at the beach - self pity - centring herself - quote p.43 - Realises that Callum must be in with LM p.43
24. Jude and Ryan leave - Callum challenges Jude and his alliance with LM - Jude's speech p.44
25. Jasmine confronts Sephy - talk about the trauma of the bomb p.45 - suggests boarding school
26. Raid on McGregors' home - Callum arrested - Kelani Adams QC - Benefactor - anonymous - Callum's realisation p.45 Jude planted bomb.
27. Court - Sephy and Callum's perspectives - video evidence - Sephy testifies - Ryan found guilty
28. Execution - links to lynching - public - Jim Crow Sephy made to attend - stay of execution p.53 - Ryan's thoughts p.54
29. Callum wants to break off - p.54 - they meet up at Sephy's and argue - both learning from situation - Sephy announces she is going to boarding school p.56 Callum's response
30. Ryan's death and escape - Kamal's response

## Act Two

1. Ensemble - questions letters - three years on- flash back to Sephy giving Meggie a letter for Callum - Flashback with Jude - Callum has left Heathcroft - decides to join LM - revenge - Mum gives him letter - Sephy's time at school - letter from Callum
2. They meet - Sephy is Kidnapped by LM and set up by Callum
3. News report of Sephy's kidnap

4. Hideout - news Kamal stepping down p.62 - Callum and Jude tension - loyalty - Sephy recognises Andrew's voice - Callum finally reads Sephy's letter p.65 - Sephy realises they plan to kill her p.66 - Sephy's activism - power p.66 - they make love - Jude interrupts - Sephy escapes - Morgan shot - Sephy's perspective - tells Callum about Andrew and Callum allows Sephy to escape
5. Kamal's statement - Jude and Callum part - Warns Callum re Sephy p.72 - foreshadowing
6. Sephy's thoughts pp.72-73 - pregnancy
7. Confides in Minnie who thinks that Sephy has been raped
8. Callum on the run - Minnie betrays Sephy
9. Callum hears of pregnancy, arranges to meet Sephy and is arrested.
10. Kamal tries to blackmail Sephy into an abortion and in exchange avoid Callum receiving death penalty
11. Kamal tries to blackmail Callum into getting Sephy to agree to an abortion in exchange of avoiding death penalty
12. Callum's death
13. Epilogue p.81

# NOUGHTS & CROSSES



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