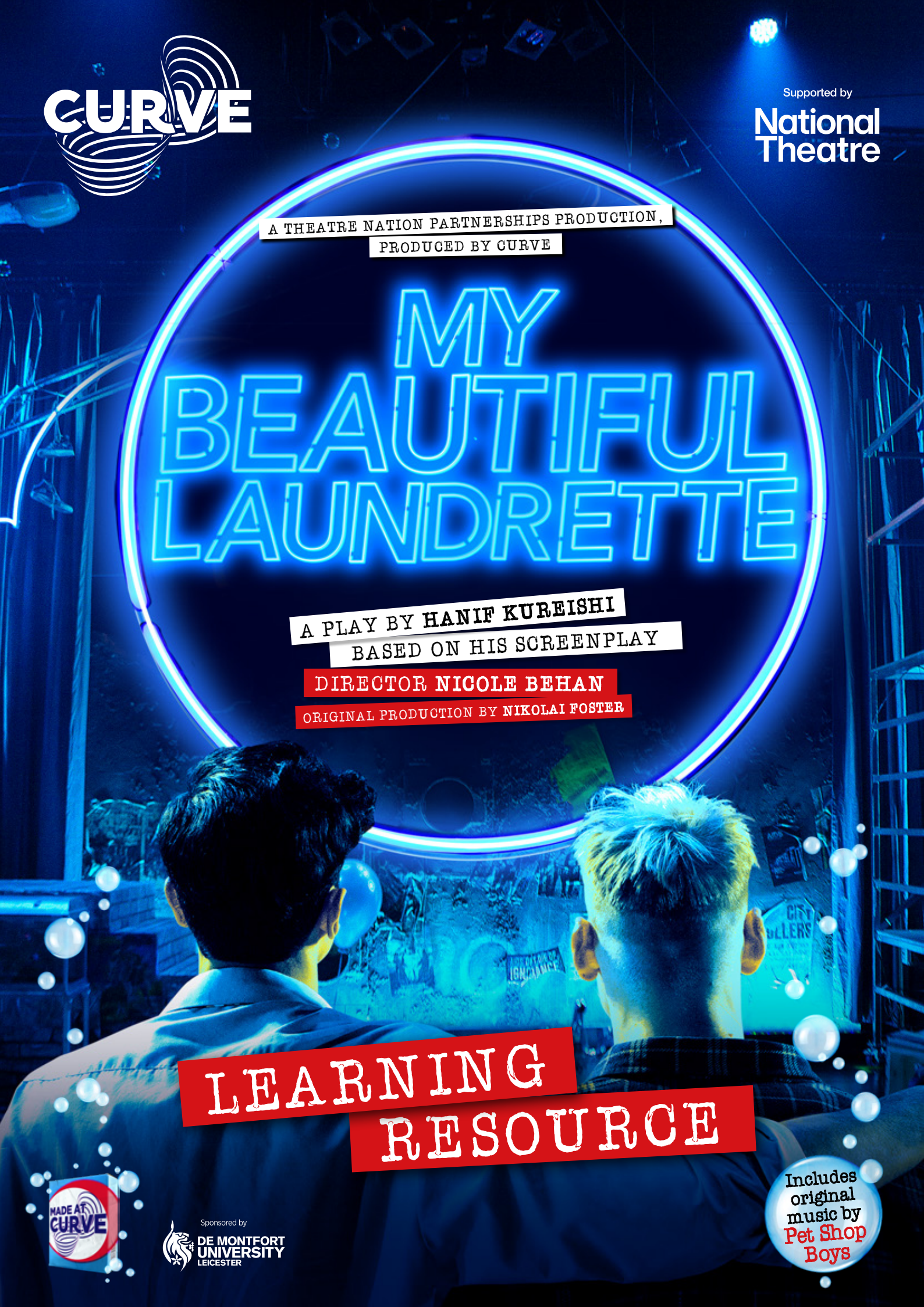
CURVE
Supported by
National Theatre
A THEATRE NATION PARTNERSHIPS PRODUCTION,
PRODUCED BY CURVE
MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE
A PLAY BY HANIF KUREISHI
BASED ON HIS SCREENPLAY
DIRECTOR NICOLE BEHAN
ORIGINAL PRODUCTION BY NIKOLAI FOSTER
LEARNING RESOURCE
MADE AT CURVE
Sponsored by
DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY LEICESTER
Includes original music by Pet Shop Boys

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Photography by **Ellie Kurttz** from the 2019 Curve production of ***My Beautiful Laundrette***.

1. SYNOPSIS

The play is set in South London in the 1980s, it concerns a second-generation British Pakistani man, Omar, renovating the Churchill Laundrette who comes into contact again with a young schoolmate Johnny and his gang of far-right extremist skinheads. Omar and Johnny reconnect and begin to run the laundrette together, and the play documents the struggles the pair face as they come from opposing cultures, in so many ways.



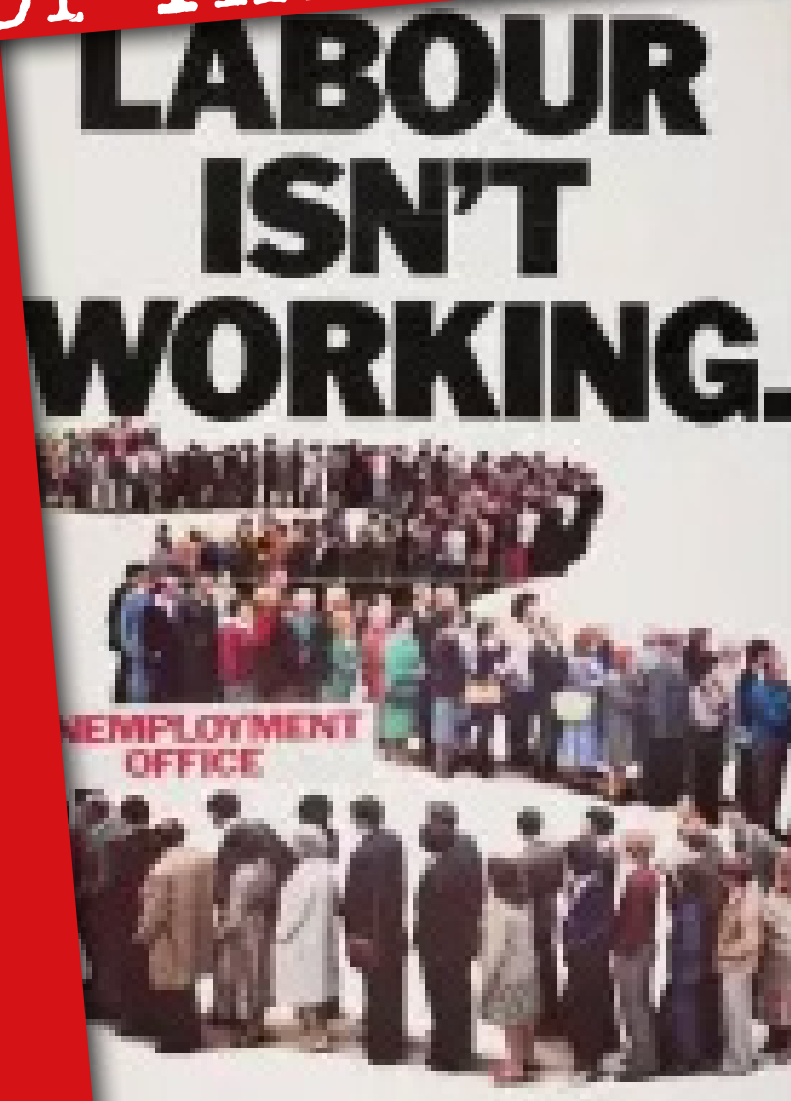
Two other characters – Omar's father Hussain and Omar's uncle Nasser – are first generation Pakistani migrants, and respectively represent the poles of cultural identity Omar is pulled between. Omar's father is a disillusioned socialist intellectual and opposed to the prevailing cultural attitudes of contemporary Thatcherite Britain. Nasser, however, embraces the Westernised capitalist ethos and has a white mistress; it is he who is asked to find his nephew employment. Nevertheless, Nasser does maintain some non-westernised attitudes.





2. CONTEXT OF THE PLAY





POLITICS

Socialism

Socialism is a political and economic system in which the means of production and property have public ownership and are not controlled by the government. Omar's father, Hussain holds Socialist principles.

Fascism

Fascism is the political viewpoint that one's nation and race are superior to all others. It is a far-right, authoritarian, ultra-nationalist political ideology and movement, characterized by a dictatorial leader. Genghis holds fascist principles.

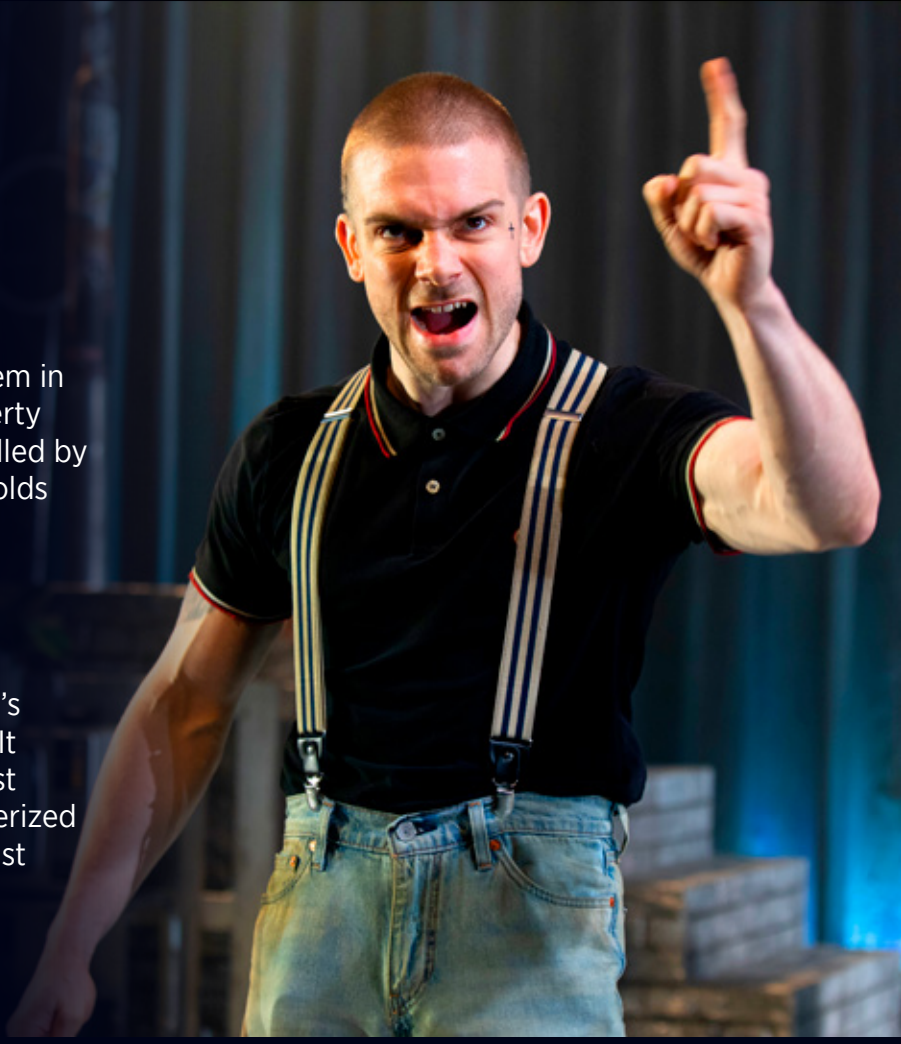
Conservativism

Conservatism is a cultural, social, and political philosophy that seeks to promote and to preserve traditional institutions, customs, and values. Omar's uncle Nassar holds Conservative principles.

Margaret Thatcher

Thatcher was the British Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990 and Leader of the Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990.

In domestic affairs, Thatcher is best known for her sweeping policies concerning the affairs of the economy, including the privatisation of most nationalised industries. In foreign policy, she fought a war against Argentina and played a key role with US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in ending the Cold War. By the late 1980s, she would alienate several senior members of her Cabinet with her opposition to greater economic integration into the European Community. She also alienated many Conservative voters and members of Parliament with the imposition of a local poll tax.



Life for a Pakistani family in London during the 1980s

Life was particularly hard for Pakistanis in London during the 1980s as they faced societal racism, discrimination and poverty. Violent gangs opposed to immigration took part in frequent attacks which targeted and assaulted Pakistanis and other South Asian communities. These attacks peaked during the mid 1980s, with the attacks mainly linked to far-right fascist, racist and anti-immigrant movements, including the white power skinheads, the National Front, and the British National Party (BNP).

These attacks were also fuelled by the British media's anti-immigrant and anti-Pakistani rhetoric at the time, and by systemic failures of state authorities, which included under-reporting racist attacks, the criminal justice system not taking racist attacks seriously, constant racial harassment by police, and sometimes police involvement in racist violence.

Photography by **Ellie Kurttz** from the 2019 Curve production of ***My Beautiful Laundrette***.

Photography by **Ellie Kurttz** from the 2019
Curve production of ***My Beautiful Laundrette***.





3. THE WRITER
HANIF KUREISHI CBE

Kureishi was born in South London in 1954 to a Pakistani father and British mother. His paternal grandfather had been a colonel in the Indian army (moving to Pakistan after the Partition of British India in 1947), and Kureishi recalls the lavish, high-powered life his grandparents and father enjoyed both in India and Pakistan. They socialised with prominent families, his uncle Omar was a columnist and managed the Pakistan cricket team and his colonel grandfather was 'hard-living, hard-drinking'.

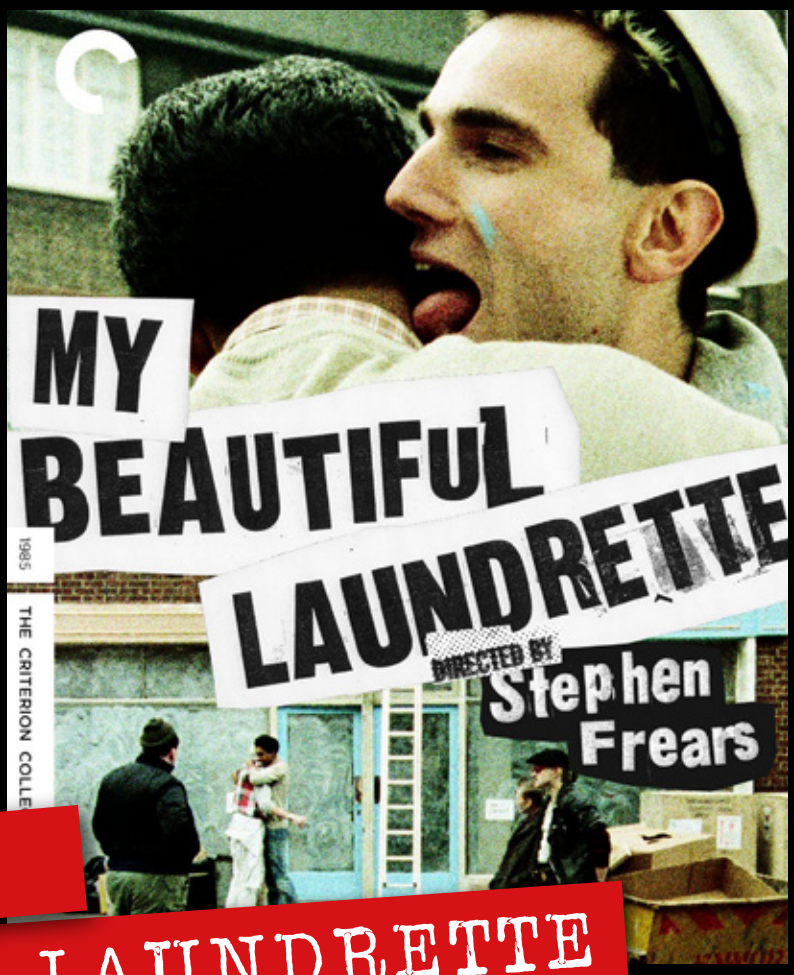
Kureishi himself was a literature fiend from a young age, borrowing book after book from South London libraries and documenting them in a notebook, as many as 84 in one year. In his job as a paper boy, he arrived early to sit on the kerb to read the papers. He pins his reading obsession on the restless monotony of Bromley – "a lot happened while nothing much appeared to be happening" (which he depicts in his 1990 novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*). He later admitted he never liked the punks of the 70s, but the 'anarchistic republican amorality' did appeal to him, and remarks how the growth of capitalism under Thatcher destroyed 'the very social values the party espoused' (i.e. Conservative morality). Alongside his literary fever, Kureishi still experienced the racial discrimination which was common in the day, to the extent that even one of his teachers called him 'Pakistani Pete'.

The liberal, anti-authority attitude of the 70s followed Kureishi into adulthood and can be seen in his politics, beliefs and morals. His career includes over 20 published works of literature and a CBE (Commander Of The British Empire – a prestigious award for achievements or services to the community). His work has not been without controversy: some Pakistanis claimed that *My Beautiful Laundrette* denigrated their culture.

He claims to this day that his love of literature and of pop music liberated him from his identity as a Muslim boy in the boring yet relentless streets of Bromley, and brought him to the place he is at now.

My Beautiful Laundrette was first created in 1985 as a British drama film directed by **Stephen Frears**. *My Beautiful Laundrette* was Frears' third feature film for the cinema, and starred **Gordon Warnecke** as Omar and **Daniel Day-Lewis** as Johnny.

Originally shot in 16mm for Channel 4 on a low-budget, it was met with such critical acclaim at the Edinburgh Film Festival that it was subsequently distributed internationally, and Kureishi went on to win the New York Film Critics' Best Screenplay Award, an Oscar nomination for Best Screenplay, and a nomination in the 1986 BAFTAS.



4. THE FILM MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE















5. THE MUSIC OF THE 80s
THE PET SHOP BOYS

The 1980s saw the emergence of electronic dance music and new wave. As disco fell out of fashion in the decade's early years, pop became more popular.

The **Pet Shop Boys** were a hugely successful pop duo formed in London in 1981. Vocalist **Neil Tennant** with keyboardist **Chris Lowe** sold more than 50 million records worldwide, In July 2019 they created four new tracks and incidental music for the first stage production of *My Beautiful Laundrette*.



You can listen to them on streaming platforms

Spotify
https://open.spotify.com/album/0DwTVKzeZUXyNLF3Im9DPB

Music
https://music.apple.com/gb/album/my-beautiful-laundrette/172161224















Photography by **Ellie Kurttz** from the 2019
Curve production of ***My Beautiful Laundrette***.

6. LEARNING RESOURCES

Content Advisory Information for Teachers and Group Leaders

Here is a story synopsis to share with your group:

Based on **Hanif Kureishi**'s iconic and Oscar-nominated screenplay and last brought to the stage in 2019 directed by **Nikolai Foster**, *My Beautiful Laundrette* is set in South London during the Thatcher years and tells the story of Omar; after a confrontation with a racist gang, including his former school-friend Johnny, Omar uses their history to defuse the situation. Against a backdrop of nationalism, racial tensions, financial crisis and political turmoil, the pair come together to transform a run-down laundrette and realise their feelings for one another.



Content warnings:
When working with your group, take time to explain the play is set in a particular time and place and there is language we know now wouldn't be appropriate or used today.

Please be aware this production contains strong language including swearing, and racial slurs from the start and throughout.

The play includes scenes of explicit violence and racial aggression throughout. There are visual depictions of fights and a knife.

There are scenes of sexual intimacy between Johnny and Omar.

There is depiction of drug use, drug dealing and smoking.

The production references alcoholism and the suicide of a mother.

There are no strobe like lighting effects.

The show comes with an advisory age guidance of 14+

Running time is 2 hours and 15 minutes including a 20-minute interval.

If you would like to watch an archive recording of the original company in conversation with Hanif Kureishi and Nikolai Foster, please click here:

https://www.curveonline.co.uk/news/curve-in-conversation-my-beautiful-laundrette/

You can also request a copy of the script and Archive Recording of the Dress Rehearsal from the original Curve production by emailing **learning@curvetheatre.co.uk**



LEARNING RESOURCES

PAGE TO STAGE

How can I develop my character?

What do I know about my character?
How do they see themselves?
What do others think about them?
Complete the character study.

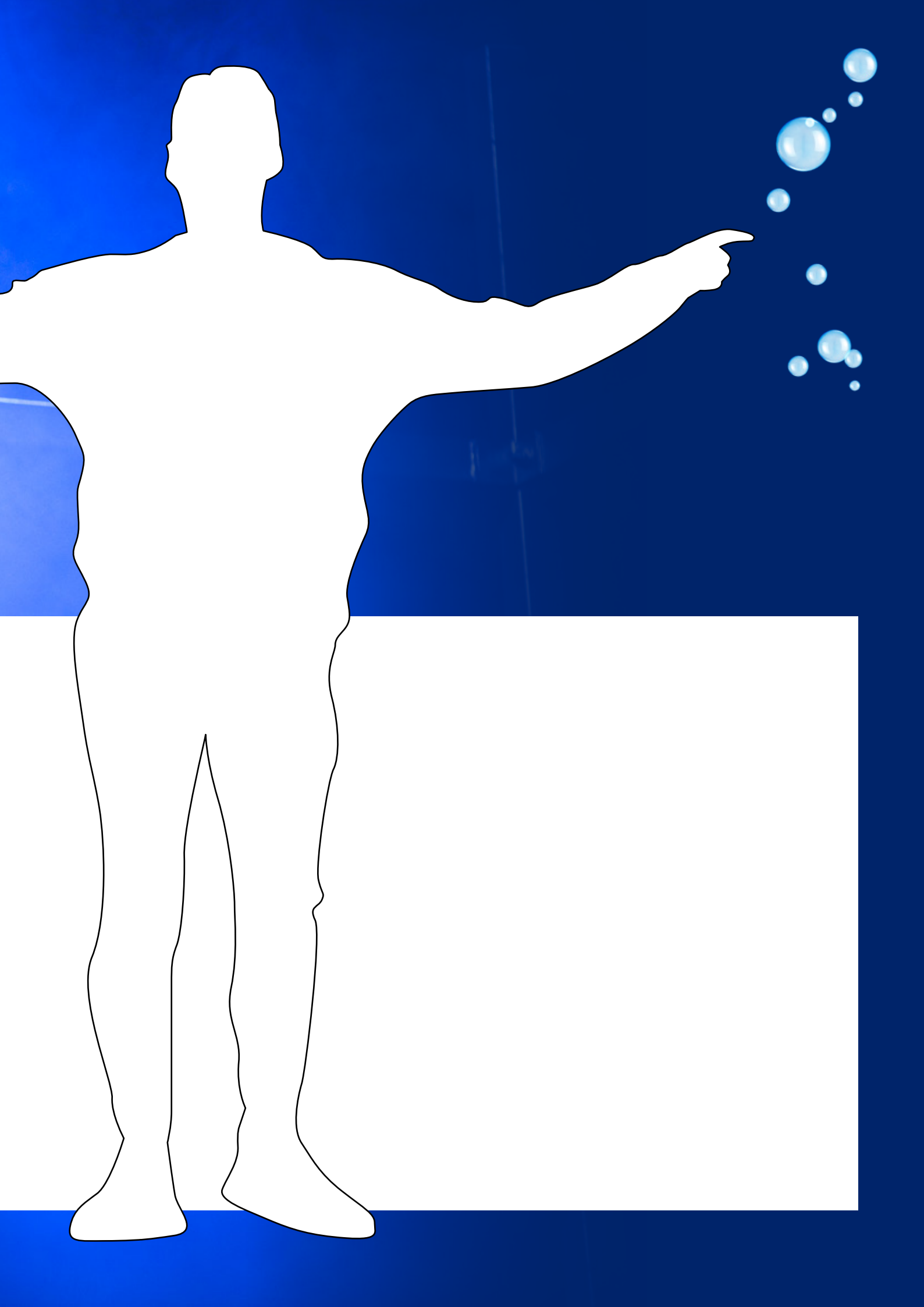
Inside the body outline:
Write down any words, thoughts, or examples of how the character feels and how they see themselves. These can be:

- Connected to a specific scene or moment
- Before, during or after your extract
- Throughout their journey in the play

Outside the body outline:
Consider how other people think about your character. Use any words, thoughts or examples that demonstrate this.

How does this help you understand the different relationships the characters experiences in the play?

Think?
Intention • Motivation • Tension
Rapport • Antagonist • Manipulation



LEARNING RESOURCES

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT



Click to see: *My Beautiful Laundrette*:
Learning Resource – Character Development Video

How do I learn my lines for the chosen extract?

During your time in Drama, you will experience reading from a script with your peers. This could be by delivering lines as an ensemble or using chorus speaking, in small groups, as a duologue or as an individual for a monologue. You will need to learn your lines so that the scenes and interactions flow and are ready for a sharing, performance or assessment.

Photography by **Ellie Kurttz** from the 2019 Curve production of ***My Beautiful Laundrette***.

Here are some suggested ways of learning lines.
Try them out and find your preferred way of working.

10 Top Tips

1. Repetition, Repetition, Repetition!
2. Read, Say, Cover, Check – and repeat.
3. Re-write or word process your extract.
4. Block your script- add in stage directions.
5. Highlighting your script.
6. Record yourself, your group or partner reading through the extract.
7. If you have a long speech or monologue, break your lines into chunks or sections.
8. Make some photocopies and display it in your room, on the fridge or on cupboard doors, to prompt you, as you go over it.
9. Ask someone to run your lines with you – they can prompt you when you forget!
10. Rehearse your lines throughout the day, in the morning, afternoon and evening (just before bed!) in 5 and 10-minute blocks.

Another Important Top Tip!

Don't just learn your lines, make sure you understand what the character is saying and why? By doing this it will help your character communicate the correct feelings, emotions, or reactions in a scene to the audience.

- It will add more meaning and depth to the scene.
- It will help to explore interactions with other characters.
- It will help the audience identify who is the protagonist, antagonist, hero or anti-hero etc.
- It will improve the communication of the aim and message and overall impact on the audience.

There are some Apps available to help you learn your lines, here are some examples.
Be aware that whilst some are free, others may have a cost to them.

- **ColdRead:** This app records you speaking lines into your device then acts as a reading partner.
- **LineLearner:** This app allows multiple users to record their individual lines and share them so everyone can rehearse "together."
- **Memorize Lines: MemoCoach**
- **Memorize by Heart**
- **Rehearsal Pro**

You may find these links useful:

https://www.cityheadshots.com/blog/apps-for-memorizing-lines

https://scriptrehearser.com

LEARNING RESOURCES

CHARACTER

YOUR CHOSEN SCRIPT

Choose an extract to work through in the circuit.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE CONTEXT OF THE PLAY

5 Ws

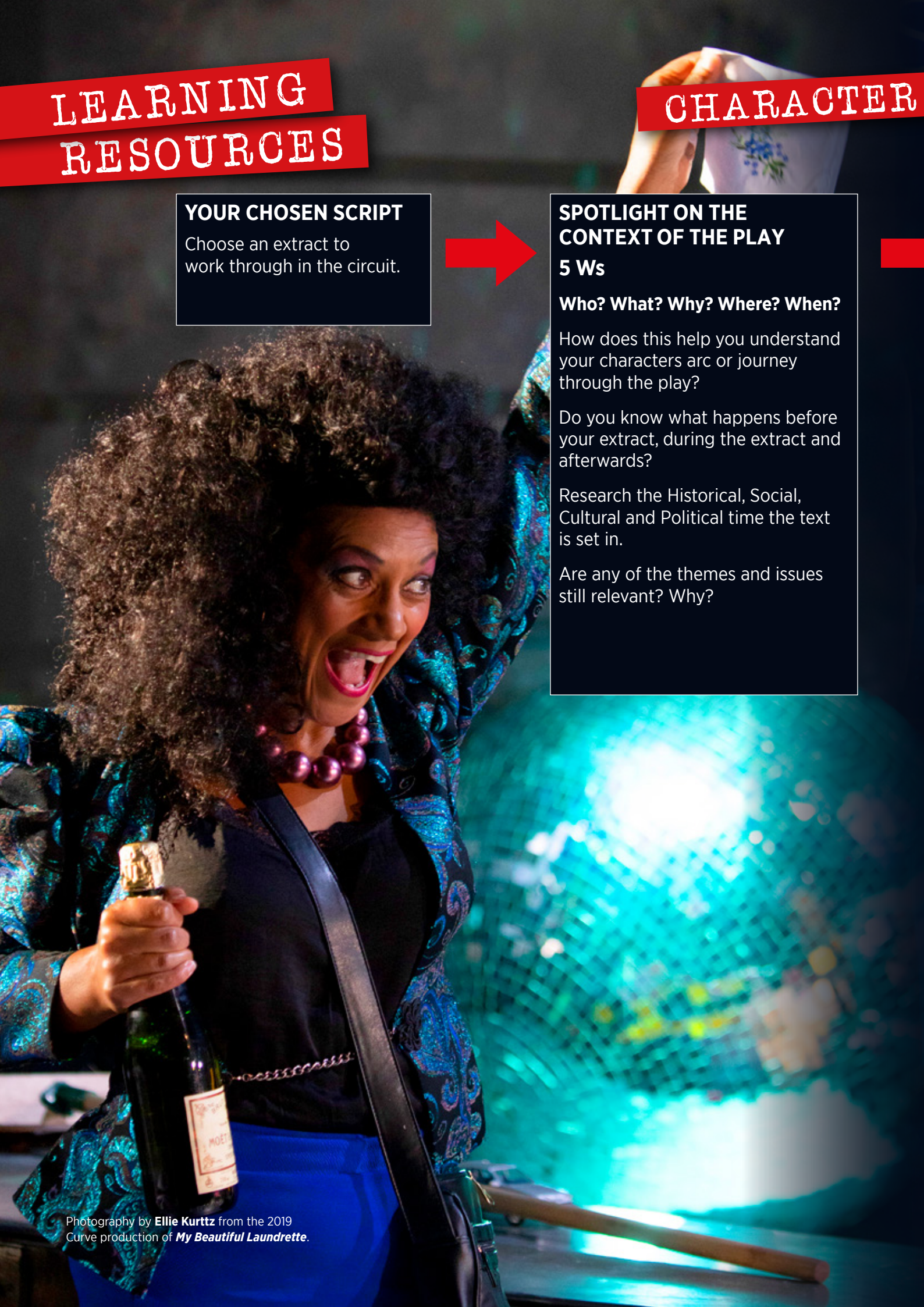
Who? What? Why? Where? When?

How does this help you understand your characters arc or journey through the play?

Do you know what happens before your extract, during the extract and afterwards?

Research the Historical, Social, Cultural and Political time the text is set in.

Are any of the themes and issues still relevant? Why?



Photography by **Ellie Kurttz** from the 2019 Curve production of ***My Beautiful Laundrette***.

CIRCUIT

CHOOSE 6, 8 OR 12 LINES TO LEARN AND EXPLORE THROUGH THIS CIRCUIT

Dip into the different tasks and as you develop a better understanding of your character and their intention in the scene.

Look at the Learning Lines section on the previous page.

FIND A SPACE IN THE ROOM

What is your starting position?

Are you sitting, standing, kneeling, or lying down?

Where are you positioned in the space?

Think impact on audience!

Upstage Right	Upstage	Upstage Left
Stage Right	Centre Stage	Centre Stage
Downstage Right	Downstage	Downstage Left
Audience		

NAVIGATE YOUR JOURNEY THROUGH THE TEXT

- Say the text as you walk the space.
- Record yourself saying the extract.
- Consider where you can pause, stop, change the tone, pitch, pace, and volume of your voice.
- How does the inflection of your voice change when you are delivering different lines of dialogue?
- What can the intonation of your voice tell the audience?
- Which words will you stress or emphasis and why?
- **Projection of your voice:** Can the audience hear what you are saying?
- **Diction:** Can the audience understand what you are saying? Work on the clarity of the words.
- Does your character speak with an accent or dialect?
- Are you talking directly to the audience? (Direct address) or to another character?

PHYSICALITY

Posture • Stance • Actions and Gestures

Body Language • Facial Expression • Levels

Explore the physicality of your character by varying these!

What questions do you still have about your character?

Is there a section you need to repeat or revisit?

Perform your extract and get some feedback on how your character has developed.

LEARNING RESOURCES

An example of character notes given to actors prior to audition.

NASSER
Late 40s/early 50s. Successful 80s business type. Shaped by cultural traditions. Middle-class. Aspirational. Enjoys the good life: nice house, cars, day at the races, buying gifts for his mistress. Understands Thatcher's government and plays the game with admirable skill.

HUSSAIN and **PAPA**
Brother to Nasser. Papa to Omar. Late 40s/early 50s. "As thin as a medieval Christ". An unkempt alcoholic, but with innate dignity. Exceptional intelligence. A journalist in Pakistan. Too outspoken and intelligent to conform and play the game. Whilst he once had a thirst for life and being part of it, he now sees the futility of it at every turn and has opted out of life. A year before our play begins, his wife committed suicide.

OMAR
Early 20s. Curious. Awake. Cheeky. Quick-witted. A fun, subversive wit that is born out of being the outsider – an observer, marginalised and sitting on the fringes of his own culture and English culture. Since the suicide of his mother, cares for his alcoholic papa. Described as "nervous" by family members. Finds his confidence and spring awakening with his renewed relationship with Johnny (they went to school together).

JOHNNY
"An angelic thug". White British, working class. Early 20s. Confident. Oozes sex appeal. A natural leader. Punk. Flair. Bags of charisma. Poetic inner life and thoughtful soul. Instinctive and intuitive understanding of human nature. Complex, yet completely straight forward. Trying to make something of his life and leave the harsh life on the streets.



Photography by **Ellie Kurttz** from the 2019 Curve production of ***My Beautiful Laundrette***.

MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE CHARACTER LIST

GENGHIS
White British. Late teens/early 20s. Nazi/BNP supporter. Completely adrift in life. No structure and from a challenging background. Blames the immigrants for all of his problems.

SALIM
Late 30s in script, but could be younger. Pakistani. Slick. A bit flash. 80s yuppie-type. Outgoing, confident. "Cunning, dangerous and a liar." Drug dealer, a wily fox, unafraid to take risks in the quest to survive. A victim of the fractured society presented in the play.

RACHEL
Early 40s. Nasser's mistress. Middle class. Proud and glamorous. 80s chic.

TANIA
Nasser's eldest daughter – in her 20s. Determined to break free. Like Omar, sees the changing world ahead of her, and wants to be part of the future. Has a cool, aloof edge. Street smart. Feisty. Full of vim. Can play the game, but always has an eye on escaping the constraints of traditional family life. Flashes of her inner loneliness and frustration occasionally are seen. She wants to marry Omar but she finds out he is gay. Ambition to be a designer.



LEARNING RESOURCES

PAGE TO STAGE

Are there any techniques that will help me develop my character further?

Using drama techniques developed by theatre practitioners can help you to explore your character in more depth and deepen your characterisation. These are just a few suggestions. Carry out some further research for yourself and find ones that work well for you!

1. Hot seating.
2. A role on the wall.
3. Exploring the subtext.
4. Improvisation and performing the script in your own words.



Photography by **Ellie Kurttz** from the 2019 Curve production of ***My Beautiful Laundrette***.

Research who this practitioner is and what they were known for.

Stanislavski – Given Circumstances

Given circumstances are what Stanislavski believed we should do as soon as we have been given a script. They should be facts about the conditions of the play and help an actor to answer the six fundamental questions who? when? where? why? what? and how?

WHO?
who is your character, but it is also helpful to sum up who the other characters are (acting is reacting, it is all about what your character "needs" from the other person).

WHAT?
what is going on within the scene, the key talking point/ potential obstacle.

WHERE?
where are you, your location, inside or outside. Describe as you are creating the world of the play?

WHEN?
what time of day, what time of year? Knowing this will affect a change within your character and their reactions with others.

WHY?
why is this conversation taking place. Why is there tension between the characters?

HOW?
The reason behind this conversation, did something happen in the scene before? and how – did your character instigate this moment in the play?

https://heatheractingwork.wordpress.com/2012/12/20/-circumstances/

The Magic If?
Stanislavski said that the character should answer the question, *'What would I do if I was in this situation?'* Also known as the 'magic if', this technique means that the actor puts themselves into the character's situation. This then stimulates the motivation to enable the actor to play the role.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zxn4mp3/revision/6

Research who this theatre practitioner is and what they were known for.

Uta Hagen's 9 Questions

1. Who am I?
Who is your character? Identify all the details: name/age, physical traits, education, personal opinions, likes, dislikes, fears, ethics, and beliefs.

2. What time is it?
The year, the season, the day, the minute. What is the significance of time?

3. Where am I?
Identify the country, the city/town, the neighbourhood, the building, the room or the specific area of the room.

4. What surrounds me?
What is happening in the environment around you? Weather, landscape, people, animate/ inanimate objects?

5. What are the given circumstances?
Identify events in the past, present, and future. What has happened, what is happening, what is going to happen?

6. What are my relationships?
This is more than your relationship to other people. Think about your relationship to objects, characters, and events.

7. What do I want?
What do you want immediately? What does the character want overall?

8. What is in my way?
What are the obstacles to getting what you want?

9. What do I do to get what I want?
What actions do you take (both physically and verbally)? What tactics?

https://www.theatrefolk.com/blog/uta-hagens-nine-questions/

Try them out and decide which one works best for you. Does it strengthen your portrayal of the character?

LEARNING RESOURCES

PAGE TO STAGE

How do I understand the world of the play?

Research and Fact Finding

1. What is the title of the play or extract it's taken from?
2. Who is the playwright?
3. When was it written?
4. What are the themes and issues?
5. Where is the play set? (location)
6. Research the playwrights notes or intentions
7. Read the Character Notes section on page 10
8. What is the genre?
9. What is the style of performance?
10. What is the structure of the play?

Understanding the context of the play

(What was happening at the time the play was written.)

Complete the boxes below with the research you have completed on the extract or play you are studying.

Historical

What was happening in the world, when the play was written.

Social

The way people lived and what they believed at the time the play was written.

Cultural

The arts, fashion and popular culture that are associated with that time and or place.

Political

The impact of political environment, changes, values and issues on society, during that time.

Use this section for *My Beautiful Laundrette* Context
Margaret Thatcher • Miners' Strike • 1980s • Multi-cultural Britain • Culture & Tradition • Racism



Photography by **Ellie Kurttz** from the 2019 Curve production of ***My Beautiful Laundrette***.

LEARNING RESOURCES



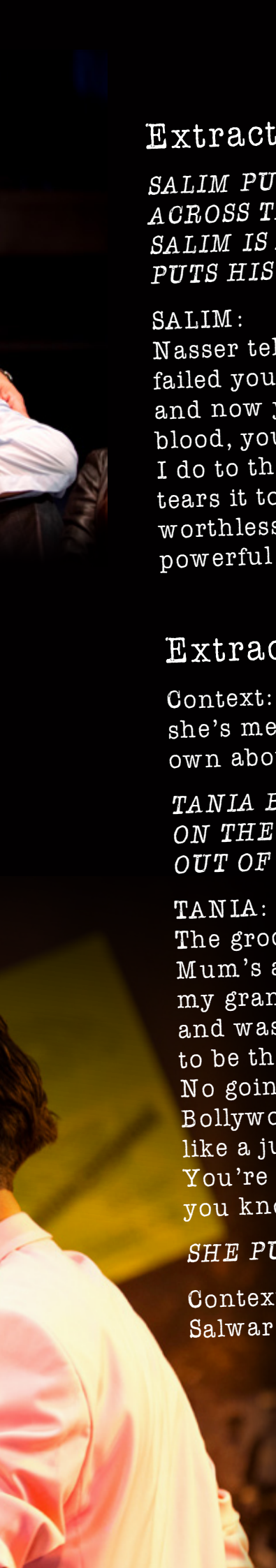
Practice some of the techniques described earlier in this resource pack using these script extracts from *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

EXTRACT: Scene 3

NASSER:
What am I going to do with you? Make you eat and drink and turn you into something damn good. Your father can't now, can he? With your mother gone, he seems to have given up entirely- Poor fellow. We played cricket together, and he was always the captain. In the days when the Union Jack still fluttered, the Viceroy's wife called him to her house in Delhi. Usually natives like us did not mingle with their masters, but she admired my brother's wit and intelligence. She said he would be the face of the new India. He set the mark for what this family should be. He was the new ruling class in waiting...

RACHEL NODS AT NASSER AND HE TAKES OUT HIS WALLET. HE GIVES OMAR MONEY. OMAR DOESN'T WANT TO TAKE IT. NASSER SHOVES IT DOWN OMAR'S JUMPER, AND THEN CUDDLES HIS CONFUSED NEPHEW.





Extract Scene 9

SALIM PUSHES OMAR HARD AND OMAR CRASHES BACKWARDS ACROSS THE ROOM. AS HE GETS UP QUICKLY TO REACT, SALIM IS AT HIM, SHOVING HIM BACK DOWN, VICIOUSLY. HE PUTS HIS FOOT ON OMAR'S NOSE.

SALIM:
Nasser tells me you're ambitious to do something. But twice you failed your exams! I doubt you'll do anything with the laundrette and now you are trying to bugger me up! You've too much white blood, you belong to that generation of misfits. You know what I do to them? I take out this. (He takes out a pound note. He tears it to pieces.) I say: your English pound is worthless. It's worthless like you, Omar. Your whole great family – rich and powerful over there – is let down by you!

Extract Scene 11*

Context: This is the second time we see Tania in the play, after she's met Omar. She is a strong character with a mind of her own about the roles and relationships in the family.

TANIA BURSTS INTO HER BEDROOM, A POSTER OF QUEEN ON THE WALL. SHE TAKES HER TRADITIONAL INDIAN DRESS OUT OF HER DRAWER AND THROWS IT TO THE FLOOR.

TANIA:
The grocers, the meat shop, cooking chicken today, the routine. Mum's always frightened Freddie. It's killing me. Just because my grandmother walked to Pakistan and it took her two weeks and was married at 15 and then eleven children. I don't want to be that girl married to a stranger. (Imitating her mother) No going to the cinema in slutty buttie tight jeans to see Indian Bollywood picture and drinking Fanta, which makes you gassy like a jungli girl. A mother with three unmarried daughters. You're ruining my entire life with your originality". Arghhh! Do you know what, Freddie, I'm glad to be original! I'm glad.

SHE PUTS ON MUSIC. LOUD.

Context: When we see Tania the next time in the play, she is in Salwar Kamiz, looking stunning. She is dressed up for Omar.

*Written by Hanif Kureishi especially for this 2024 production.

Photography by **Ellie Kurttz** from the 2019 Curve production of ***My Beautiful Laundrette***.



If you have any questions about this resource or would like to discuss how Curve can work with you and your students, please contact **learning@curvetheatre.co.uk**

THANK YOU

Photography by **Ellie Kurttz** from the 2019 Curve production of ***My Beautiful Laundrette***.

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CURVE THEATRE, LEICESTER

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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND
Leicester City Council

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