



Three Sisters

By Anton Chekhov
Adapted by Mustapha Matura

Resource Pack

By
Juliet Raynsford
Education Officer

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THREE SISTERS

By Mustapha Matura

RESOURCE PACK

By Juliet Raynsford

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Who attended the Three Sisters Skills X-Change event at The Birmingham REP on 26th January 2006

INTRODUCTION

In 2006 **The Eclipse Theatre Initiative** is resident at Birmingham Repertory Theatre. This is a natural development in The Rep's long history of producing and developing diverse theatre. It is particularly exciting to be the producing theatre for *Three Sisters* – a true contemporary classic adapted by the award-winning African Caribbean writer Mustapha Matura. It promises to bring Chekhov's masterpiece to a new audience and provide an exciting and diverse new production to more traditional audiences for classical theatre.

The REP has been a partner on two previous Eclipse productions; Brecht's *Mother Courage* and Roy Williams' *Little Sweet Thing*. We look forward to taking *Three Sisters* into the Eclipse partner venues of Nottingham Playhouse and Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich and then on tour around the country.

In January 2006 I met with teachers from the West Midlands area at The REP's Skills X-Change day. Skills X-Change days are designed to give teachers an insight into a forth-coming main stage production and to provide classroom ideas and background information on the production's creative process. In the afternoon of the event we take a close look at the resource materials The REP Education Department has already produced and teachers offer their feedback and ideas. During the January event we identified 3 core aims that this pack should achieve;

1. Background information on the culture and history of Trinidad
2. An insight into Colonialism and how it affects the choices and aspirations of the characters in the play.
3. Fun and accessible classroom activities for mixed abilities and ages from Key Stage Four upwards.

Following on from the success of *Three Tales of Courage*, (the outreach and education piece developed to accompany the national tour of *Mother Courage* in 2004), a new education play has been commissioned to accompany *Three Sisters*. Written by the same playwright, Dystin Johnson, *Acts of Love*, explores the main themes of *Three Sisters*, the melting pot of ambition, disillusion and boredom in a contemporary setting. The final part of the resource pack explores how this play can be used with students to enhance their appreciation of the themes of *Three Sisters*.

As this pack is completed Paulette Randall (Director) and the cast are busy rehearsing. Having watched early run-throughs I have come away with the feeling that this is going to be a really vibrant and thought-provoking piece of theatre. I hope your students enjoy the production and that this resource pack is useful in extending their appreciation of the play's themes, characters and plot and the productions creative process.

Juliet Raynsford
Education Officer

What's the story?

An easy to use, act by act, synopsis of *Three Sisters*

(Key themes and incidents for further discussion are highlighted in blue)

What do we need to know about what's happened to the characters before the play starts?

The action takes place in a large house owned by the three Rivers sisters and their brother, which they inherited from their parents. Their mother died a number of years ago, and it is exactly a year since their father died when the play starts.

About eleven years ago their father undertook an administration course in Cambridge, England. The whole family travelled with him to England. This was a fantastic trip of a lifetime for the sisters and marked an extremely happy time for the family. **The sisters, particularly Alma and Audrey, long to return to Cambridge and re-capture those happy times.**

The sisters are desperate to maintain the middle-class lifestyle and values they enjoyed while their father was alive. But, since his death there have been big changes. The sisters are no longer as well off. They have had to let their cook, their washerwoman and their yard boy go. Alma has had to find work, as will Audrey by the end of the play.

ACT ONE

It is early September 1941. It is the afternoon. We are in the drawing room of the family's middle-class house in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in the British West Indies. Family and friends are gathering round the house to celebrate Audrey's birthday.

The sisters muse on the fact that it is a year since their father died. Audrey and Alma talk with fondness and nostalgia about their visit to Cambridge, England, eleven years ago. Audrey, in particular talks about how she would like to return there. Helen stays aloof from her sisters' discussion, making notes in a notebook.

Britain is at war with Germany. As the 'motherland', as many Trinidadians refer to Britain, gets drawn further and further into conflict more and more Trinidadians get recruited to the armed services. The sisters' conversation constantly drifts back to the war.

Scott and Lucas, two local servicemen, have come to the house. They stand on the veranda talking about their army training. When they come into the house Scott tells the sisters he's invited his Platoon Captain over. He explains the Captain is a British Officer who has recently arrived in Trinidad with his wife and daughter.

Lucas explains that there has been a bit of an 'incident', involving the Captain's wife, dancing with a 'rough black feller'. Audrey tells Lucas not to spread gossip in polite company.

Talk turns to the war. **Scott comments on how he thinks Trinidad isn't a very progressive society, with people more interested in getting drunk, dancing and having babies than thinking about the future. Lucas argues that the main priority is defeating the Germans and that its essential for Trinidad men to join up because other wise 'we'll all be taking orders and speaking German'.**

Helen announces she is going home. Alma is annoyed with her. How can she leave her sister's birthday party?

A bunch of flowers has arrived for Audrey. They are very pretty and look expensive. They are from Raoul Gomez, a local florist. It is clear the sisters don't really like him. The implication is if he is trying to endear himself to Audrey and he is not a desirable suitor.

Alma gives Audrey a birthday present. It's a set of sterling silver cutlery. Helen comments that Alma has been too extravagant in her present. Helen gives Audrey a present. It is a broach. It, too, is expensive. Alma comments that she is not the only one to spoil her little sister.

Scott gives Audrey a present. It is a wrapped photograph of himself in full army uniform. Audrey says she will put it by her bed next to her photograph of the family in Cambridge.

Lucas gives Audrey a present. It is a bracelet. He goes to kiss her, like everyone else has done, but she moves away. It is clear she is not comfortable with him getting that close to her. Lucas explains he made the bracelet himself and that he has engraved his name on the inside.

Captain Richard Rivers arrives. He introduces himself to the sisters. Alma comments that Captain Rivers has the same surname as their family. Audrey asks him if he has any connection with the West Indies. He describes a couple of very loose connections involving a very distant relative who once came to the West Indies and an old painting he found in his attic of a ship's captain standing in a tropical landscape with a plantation in the background. Although the links are very tenuous Audrey concludes they may be distant cousins.

Richard tells the sisters he went to Cambridge University. They discover that by some huge coincidence they have both lived on Madingley Road in Cambridge, Richard whilst he was a student and the sisters on their visit. They also work out that they may have lived there at the same time.

There is an instant flirtatious spark between Richard and Helen and they get locked in a witty exchange concerning how Richard would 'entertain' a woman he was dating during his student days.

Their conversation is interrupted by a comment by Lucas. He tells a joke about a Grenadian illegal immigrant. Audrey comments she is bored of jokes mocking Grenadians. The sisters try and steer the conversation back to more polite subjects but Lucas is not deterred.

Helen asks Richard if he would like to visit their local cinema.

The sound of a guitar is heard. Helen explains that is the sound of their brother, Peter, playing. Peter has been seeing a woman called Jean. There is speculation they are soon to be married. Jean is not liked by the sisters. There are rumours she is dating Raoul Gomez. **The sisters consider Raoul and Jean to be a good match as they are both working-class. Thus, highlighting the sisters' social snobbery.**

Peter enters. He is introduced to Richard. Peter gives Audrey a present. It is a pearl necklace.

Peter tells Richard of his ambitions. He explains he is awaiting confirmation of his headmaster post. He explains a bungalow comes with the job. **He talks of what subjects he will teach and his hobby of researching Creole folklore. This is the first suggestion that Peter is a dreamer and out of touch with what is current and important in Trinidad at this time** He tells Richard how one day he hopes to present a paper on Creole folklore at Cambridge.

Enter Francis, Helen's husband. He is introduced to Richard. He gives Audrey a present. It is addressed to a woman called Marjorie. He takes that present back and gives her another. It is a gramophone record. Audrey puts it on. Whilst this is happening, unknown to everyone else, Peter leaves. Audrey and Francis dance.

Richard says he has to leave, but is persuaded to stay to lunch by the sisters. Francis tells Richard, he and Helen are going to the Mayor's reception later. Helen says she doesn't want to go. Francis argues with Helen, saying people 'will talk' if she doesn't go. **Helen argues she doesn't care what people think. Her apathy to life and what is happening around her is ever present throughout this act.**

Lunch is ready. All exit to the dining room except Scott and Audrey. Audrey tells Scott she doesn't like Lucas and that he makes her uncomfortable. Scott tells Audrey not to worry about Lucas. He tells her he is in love with her. She asks him not to talk about love or the future. She says both are uncertain. She reminds him of the state of Helen's marriage. She reminds him that no one knows how the war will turn out.

ACT TWO

It is early December 1941, it is early evening and we remain in the family's drawing room.

It is clear Jean is making herself at home in the Sisters' house. Jean and Peter discuss the Carnival night, she disapproves of the family's tradition of welcoming revellers. Peter returns to his room and Jean turns out all the lights and leaves also.

Helen and Richard return home from the cinema. Richard tries to kiss Helen; she resists and asks him to curb his feelings towards her. Richard explains to Helen about his daughter's illness and his wife's increasing instability. They break apart when they hear Scott and Audrey approach.

Audrey and Scott enter talking about the Carnival. They don't notice Helen and Richard until the lights are on. Scott and Audrey tell Helen and Richard of their night.
[Audrey complains that her job is suffocating.](#)

They all move through to the dining room for refreshments. Lucas enters and comments about the unruliness in Woodstock Square. He suggests the revellers should be removed dead or alive, with bayonets or rifles. Scott questions this but Richard agrees in part. Scott argues the Trinidadians are just letting off steam and announces he is leaving the military. Lucas accuses him of being a traitor and a coward, he then leaves.

Helen, Audrey, Scott and Richard then move onto the house's veranda. Richard exits to look after his daughter. Scott joins him to search for Lucas and explain his decision. Helen exits back into the house to the kitchen.

Lucas enters the veranda and tells Audrey how he feels about her, how he cares for her. Audrey abruptly cuts him off and tells him to leave and not return. Lucas says "I'll have you one way or another".

Alma and Helen enter. Helen is relieved Alma's safe. Alma asks why Raoul Gomez is parked outside their house in his car. Alma recounts the terrible time she just had at the Council meeting: the water rates have gone up, she was thrown out of the meeting and Francis didn't speak up and he wants to be Deputy Mayor.

Jean enters and tells the Sisters she is going out for some air. She exits we hear a car door opening and a car driving off.

Audrey tells Helen and Alma of Peter's gambling losses and spending on "that woman" [Jean]. [She suggests they may have to sell the house to meet his debts, and never see Cambridge again.](#)

ACT THREE

It is January 1942, the drawing room is in partial darkness, and we can hear fire engine bells and Peter playing his guitar.

Alma and Audrey are discussing the fire which is spreading through the city and sort through items of clothing to donate to those affected. Audrey leaves carrying the bundle of clothes and other items.

Helen enters and tells Alma she's prepared a soup for the fire victims. Audrey enters and tells her sisters that Scott has asked her to become engaged to him. Alma asks if she has accepted and Audrey tells her no, she's thinking about it. Helen tells her if she doesn't love him don't do it, but Alma says that [there are more important things than "so-called love"](#).

The Sisters discuss love, [Alma says she's been left on the shelf, Audrey asks why she can't remain unmarried and still be happy. Scott wants children which would mean she'd be stuck at home running the house.](#) Helen tells her not to do it, as she has fallen in love with someone who is married [Richard] and then shares her plan to spend a night with him at a friend's beach house.

Richard and Scott enter and tell the Sisters the trouble the fire has been causing: rioting, looting, mobs demanding the abolition of the water rates. Richard tells them how the mob and the regiment faced off and how Lucas charged in on his own with bayonet fixed, so that Richard had to save him.

Alma thanks him for saving the city. Richard asks Scott to reconsider his resignation but Scott declines. Helen and Richard leave together.

The all clear siren sounds and Francis enters looking for Helen. Alma tells him she's out being escorted by Richard. Francis says he's aware of how much they have been out together, and how people are starting to talk, but he thinks that Helen is only doing it to annoy the other housewives.

Francis tells Audrey and Alma that Peter has asked for a loan of £200 from him, and also Francis's brother, Clyde. He asks why? Audrey is about to suggest it's Jean's fault, when Jean enters, ready to go out.

Jean tells Audrey and Alma she is planning to visit an old lady. Francis offers to drive her but she declines, she asks him to escort her just to the corner of the street. Jean and Francis exit.

Peter enters and asks if Audrey or Alma have any cash. The Sisters confront Peter about his gambling and drinking problems as it is “bringing shame upon the Rivers family”.

Peter tells them that he is retiring from teaching and has been offered a job by Francis. Raoul Gomez has used his vote as Chairman of the Education Board to ensure Peter’s appointment as Headmaster is delayed indefinitely. Peter again asks for money. Alma relents and gives Peter some cash. He admits part of his money trouble was due to buying Jean’s new dresses. **He tells the two sisters once the war is over everything will be normal again.** Peter exits in disguise.

Audrey confesses to Alma her unhappiness at their situation: whether to marry Scott, and if to work for Francis. **She is afraid of never seeing Cambridge again.**

ACT FOUR

It is February 1942, we can hear crowds and bells, we are on the veranda.

Audrey, Scott and Francis are on their veranda waiting for the parade to march past. Scott and Francis are arguing about politics. **Scott disapproves of the war and wants “home rule”. Francis is quite happy for the English to rule, to let them have the problems of governance.**

However, the argument becomes personal with Scott calling Francis and “fat merchant”, and Francis accusing Scott of being a “coward”. Francis is about to start a fight when Audrey intervenes.

The parade marches past the house and Audrey, Francis and Scott cheer on those marching. Scott tells Audrey that Lucas has been demoted to Corporal. **Francis encourages those marching past to “kill plenty of Germans”, Scott tells them to kill the “capitalist merchants profiting from the war”.** After the remark, Francis moves away.

Scott goes to say goodbye to his former men, **Audrey asks him not to go, to leave his past behind,** but she eventually relents, she tells Scott how happy she is not to be married to him but living together instead. Scott exits.

Audrey asks Francis about what happened at the Officers’ Club last between Scott and Lucas. Francis comforts her saying it was nothing. Alma has retired to a convent to continue her writing.

Peter enters drunk and talks to Francis about business ideas. Francis reminds Peter that one condition of Peter working for him was that he remain sober, Peter tries to argue and Francis eventually gives him a job sweeping the warehouse. Peter leaves in a mask for the parade.

Alma returns and tells Audrey and Francis that while in the crowd someone squeezed her buttocks, and she enjoyed it. Alma and Francis go in to the house.

Enter Richard then Helen. He explains that he is leaving for Jamaica, then Egypt. He’s returned to kiss Helen goodbye. Richard leaves.

Alma enters, with Francis carrying a suitcase. Francis leaves and Helen tells her sisters she’s not sad, she’s happy and wanting to celebrate, to have a drink. She resolves to throw Jean out of her room when she returns, and her sisters all agree.

Peter enters, his jacket torn and covered in blood. He tells them that at the docks there was a fight between Lucas and Scott. **Lucas killed Scott by stabbing Scott in the chest with a bayonet, so he bled to death.** Audrey resolves to move back into the house to continue Scott’s work for independence.

Peter, still drunk, begins to cheer that his wife is gone. The sisters form a circle around Peter.

It begins to rain.

WHO'S WHO?

A brief description of each character



ALMA Is in her early 40s. She is the eldest sister. She has started working in the tax office. She finds the work tiring and frustrating and has started having headaches.



AUDREY Is in her early 20s, and is the youngest sister. Alma describes her in Act one as 'like Tinker Bell sprinkling joy and good cheer'. Takes in everything that happens around her, and is aware of how disillusioned her sisters have become with aspects of their lives. She becomes increasingly determined not to get into similar situations.



HELEN Is in her early 30s and is the middle sister. She is married to a local council official. They were married when she was 18. Due to her marriage, unlike her sisters, she has a comfortable income and lives in a house with domestic servants. However, the marriage is not a happy one, and Helen seeks every excuse not to spend time with her husband. She is bored of the marriage, and finds the company of her husband un-stimulating.



PETER Is in his late 20s. At the beginning of the play it is considered almost a certainty that Peter will become a Headmaster, like his father. Described as shy by one of his sisters, Peter feels a huge pressure to be successful and live up to his sisters' expectations.



LUCAS Is in his mid 20s. Is a member of the local military regiment. He is a working-class man from the countryside outside Port of Spain. At the beginning of the play army life suits Scott. He likes the very physical training, the discipline and the camaraderie. A passionate, and at times, argumentative man. He is in love with Audrey but any advance he makes is rejected by her.



EDWARD SCOTT Is in his mid 20s. Is a member of the local military regiment. At the beginning of the play he questions army life, claiming that military life is a waste of his 'intelligence'. He is in love with Audrey.



RICHARD RIVERS In his late 30s. Has recently arrived in Trinidad. He is a Platoon Captain in charge of Scott's regiment. An educated man who has studied Engineering at Cambridge. He is married, although the marriage has had problems. There is gossip about his wife and extra-marital affairs. He has two daughters.



FRANCIS Is in his early 40s. He is married to Helen. He is a dry and wet goods merchant, and elected councillor for the ward of East Belmont. He is proud of the social position he has achieved within Port of Spain society.



JEAN A working class young woman in her 20s. Confident in her sexuality, Jean often wears flamboyant clothes that the sisters consider bad taste and too revealing. Jean has started a relationship with Peter. She finds his sisters threatening and feels uncomfortable when she is around them. She gets upset and confides in Peter that she feels they look down on her.

Other characters made reference to but not seen:

MR RIVERS (Deceased)

Father of Alma, Helen, Audrey & Peter. He was a headmaster. He undertook an administration course in Cambridge, England. He took his whole family with him

RAOUL GOMEZ

Proposed Chairmen of the Education Board. Of Portuguese heritage. A local florist. A flirtatious and confident man with women. Has made previous advances towards Audrey and is thought to be having an affair with Jean

An Insight into the Background history of Trinidad

A General Overview

Since Christopher Columbus's discovery of Trinidad and Tobago in 1498, the islands have been widely regarded as among the Caribbean's greatest treasures. Indeed, Trinidad and Tobago were under Spanish, English, French and Dutch control during the colonial era before gaining independence from Britain in 1962.

The twin-island democratic republic is located at the southern end of the Caribbean archipelago, just outside the hurricane belt (a big factor in its rapidly expanding marine recreation industry). It's rich with natural resources, including vast reserves of natural gas and crude oil. Primary exports include iron and steel, organic and inorganic chemicals, beverages and fertilizer.

Important Events During British rule

1797 - The British capture Trinidad from Spain.

1834 - Slavery abolished; indentured workers brought in from India to work on sugar - Trinidad plantations.

1889 Trinidad and Tobago become a single British colony.

1908 - The first commercial oil production begins. Oil remains the foundation of Trinidad's economy today.

1938 - The steel pan is born. Alexander's ragtime band is the first known outfit to consist fully of steel bands.

1939 - 1945 – Britain and the allied forces are at war with Hitler's Germany. As a British colony thousands of Trinidadians join the armed services to fight for the freedom of the 'Motherland'.

1948 - Many Trinidadians relocate in search of a new life in what they called 'The Motherland' - England. The Empire Windrush brought many West Indians into Tilbury docks.

1959 - Britain gives Trinidad and Tobago internal self-government with Williams as the first Prime Minister.

1962 - Trinidad and Tobago gain independence and Eric Williams becomes its first Prime Minister. It becomes a republic in 1976



Where is Trinidad?

The West Indies are a large group of islands that separate the Caribbean Sea from the Atlantic Ocean. They are comprised of three (3) main island groups:

- Bahamas** (north)
- Greater Antilles** (central)
- Lesser Antilles** (southeast)

The Bahamas consist of over 3,000 individual islands and reefs.

The Greater Antilles includes the island countries of Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti and the Dominican Republic (*Hispaniola*), and Puerto Rico.

The Lesser Antilles are the much smaller islands to the southeast, and they are divided into two (2) groups, the **Leeward Islands** and **Windward Islands**.

Indians were the first inhabitants, and then, in 1492, the explorer Christopher Columbus became the first European to arrive at the islands. It's believed by historians that he first stepped foot in the Bahamas. Columbus called these islands the **Indies** because he thought he had finally reached Asia (and the East Indies). Spain, when Columbus' mistake was discovered, renamed them the **West Indies**, to distinguish them from the Spice Islands in the Pacific Ocean, (the East Indies) which we now call Indonesia.

We can see from this map that the islands cover a large distance spanning from the southern tip of the U.S.A to the North East tip of South America. Trinidad, and its sister island of Tobago lie just off the coast of Venezuela.

FIGHTING FOR THE MOTHERLAND

The Experiences of World War Two West Indian Service Personnel

Part One

“I’m speaking to you from the Cabinet Room of No.10 Downing Street. This morning the British Ambassador in Germany handed the German Government a note stating that, unless they withdraw their troops from Poland by 11.00am a state of war exists between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking was received and, consequently, this country is at war with Germany”

(Sir Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Great Britain, 3rd September 1939)

The Commonwealth involvement in World War Two

2,500,000 men and women from the Commonwealth, including the islands of the West Indies, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka volunteered for the British Armed Forces. It was the largest volunteer army in history.

As well as volunteering for the armed services during the war Commonwealth people produced vital materials for Britain, including food, rubber and oil. Other Commonwealth citizens, and 100,000 people from Ireland, came to Britain to do essential war work in factories, construction and the medical service.

After the war, many of these ex-servicemen and war workers settled in Britain, or returned to help with the reconstruction and economic recovery in the 1950s.

The British armed services and the colour bar

Throughout the 19th century West Indians had served in all of the military services. However, with the exception of periods of war, black West Indians, as well as other non-Europeans, were discouraged from joining the British armed services and only 'British born men, of British born parents, of pure European descent' could be commissioned officers. During the First and Second World Wars the armed services reluctantly recruited black West Indians and a few received temporary commissions, mainly in the Royal Air Force. The colour bar was officially lifted in 1948.

West Indian Service Personnel in World War One

Following the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 many West Indians left the colonies to enlist in the army in the UK and were recruited into British regiments. However, the War Office was concerned with the number of black soldiers in the army and tried to prevent any people from the West Indies enlisting. Indeed, the War Office threatened to repatriate any who arrived.

Eventually, after much discussion between the Colonial Office and the War Office, and the intervention of King George V, approval to raise a West Indian contingent was given on 19 May 1915. On 26 October 1915 the British West Indies Regiment was established.

The first contingent of the BWIR arrived at Seaford Camp, Sussex on 5 September 1915 for training. Further contingents arrived in 1915 and 1916, and in April 1916 left for Egypt. Later contingents sailed directly for Egypt. Twelve battalions were raised and saw service in East Africa, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Italy and France, mainly as labourers in the ammunition dumps and gun emplacements, often under heavy fire. Towards the end of the war, two battalions saw combat in Palestine and Jordan against the Turks. The BWIR was disbanded in 1919.

During World War One many West Indians served in the merchant navy. These seamen were among the largest number of early West Indian immigrants to the UK settling in the ports of Cardiff, London, Hull, Glasgow and Liverpool. This caused racial tension and led to the 1919 race riots in most of the major ports.

As a result of these riots many black seamen were repatriated to West Africa and the West Indies and later the government tried to restrict black seamen from settling in the UK. Under the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925, black British seamen who discharged in the UK had to prove their nationality or be treated as foreign subjects.

West Indian Personnel in World War Two

At the outbreak of the Second World War West Indians again tried to enlist in the British army and again met with resistance. The War Office did not want to raise a West Indian regiment but allowed those who made their own way to the UK to enlist in the army. Almost 10,000 West Indians enlisted in the army after first travelling to Britain.

After much discussion between the Colonial Office and the War Office the Caribbean Regiment was formed in April 1944 with about 1,200 men, most of who were volunteers from the local defence forces. The regiment was trained in Virginia, USA, and on 8 June 1944 were the first British regiment to celebrate the king's birthday in the US since the American Revolution.

(I gathered and edited the above information from the 'Moving Here: 200 years of immigration' website. This is an excellent site, easy to use and full of information. It can be found at www.movinghere.org.uk)

Working With Photographs

If we want to get a clearer understanding of what day to day life was like for people during a particular period, photographs can sometimes be a useful starting point.

All of the photographs below are taken in the West Indies and are from the period in which the play is set.

Exercises for students

Break in to smaller groups and discuss the photographs. What, if anything, do they tell us about life in the West Indies during that period?

Select one picture that interests you to focus on in the following exercise. Use the following questions as a guide to help start discussion.

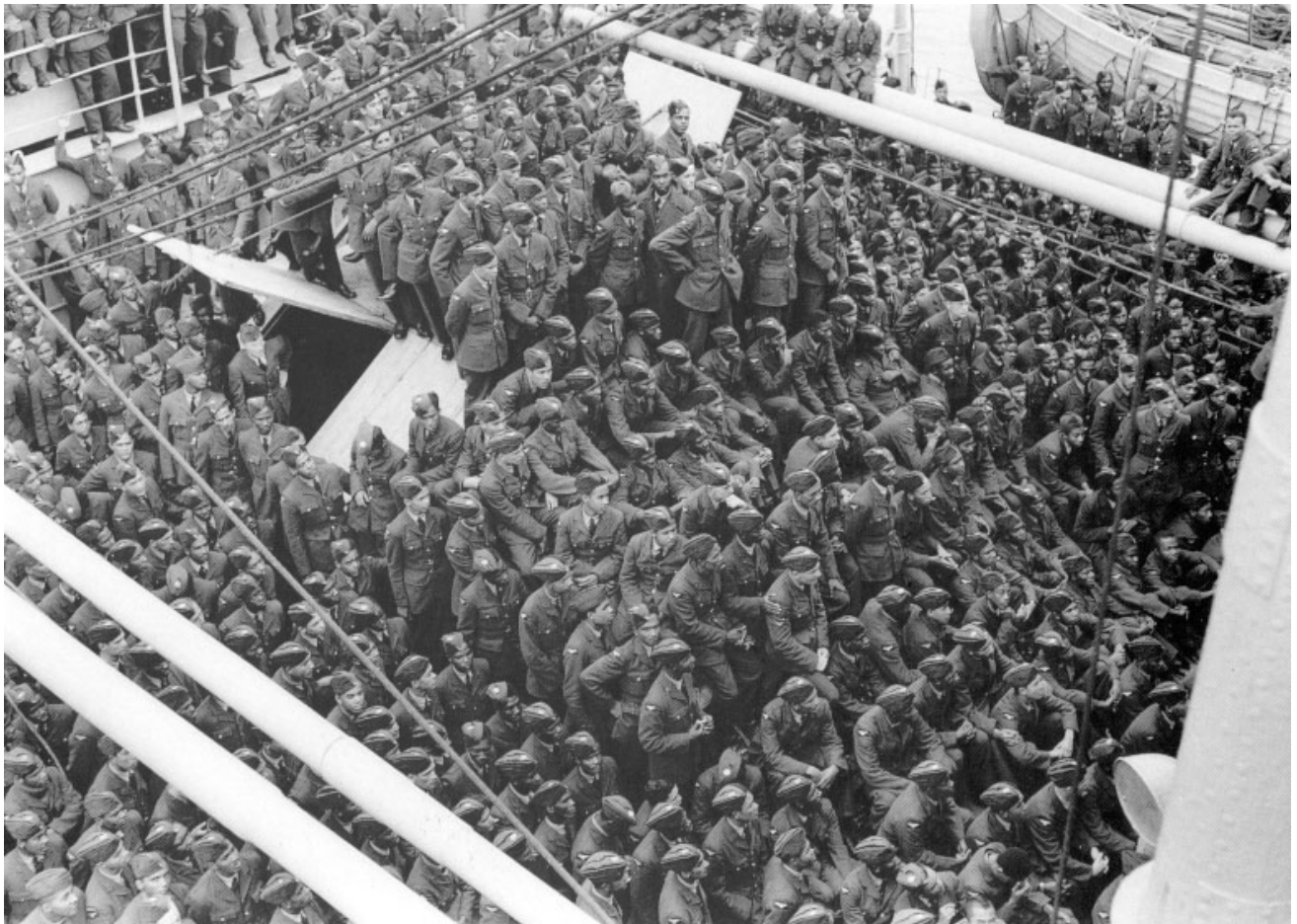
- Where do you think the characters are?
- What do you think the characters are doing?
- How do they feel about where they are and what they are doing?
- What do you think they were doing in the hours before this photograph was taken?
- Can you make suggestions about what the characters thoughts might be as the photograph is being taken?

Developing your ideas through drama

- Create a still image based upon the photograph. Students can either re-create the poses of the people in the photograph or develop their own storyline ideas. Present the still images to each other.
- Encourage the students to develop their still images into short scenes.

To increase the depth of the initial work using the photograph ask the students to return to their still images after discussing the following facts;

- During World War Two The West Indies, which included Trinidad, was a British colony. Many West Indians referred to Britain as ‘the Motherland’.
- Thousands of West Indians enlisted to fight alongside the allied forces against Hitler’s Germany.
- Throughout the 19th century there had been a ‘colour bar’ put in place by the British government banning all ‘black’ people from joining the British armed forces. Despite this overt racism many West Indians still volunteered to support Britain during both the World Wars. The colour bar was not officially lifted till 1948.
- Economically the 1930s and early 1940s had been a difficult time for many people in Trinidad. Thousands were unemployed. People working in the big industries, such as the Oil refineries, were on pitiful wages.
- The poor economic situation stirred up a new political consciousness for many islanders, with a growing number of people joining the movement calling for independence from Britain.



LEST WE FORGET

The Experiences of World War Two West Indian Service Personnel

Part Two

The quotes below are taken from an excellent book called, 'Lest we Forget – Experiences of West Indian Ex-Service Personnel in World War Two' – By Robert N Murray, produced in association with Nottingham West Indian Services Association (1996).

Ideas for using the quotes in class

I would recommend students breaking into small groups or pairs, with one quote each, with the task of answering the following questions:

- How do you think this person feels about joining the British army?
- How does this quote suggest that people in the West Indies felt about Britain being at war with Germany?
- Does the quote tell you anything about what life was like in the West Indies at that time?
- Does anything that the person says in the quote strike you as shocking or unfair? If so why?

Developing the discussions through drama exercises

If you are working with students who enjoy developing and exploring topics through drama I recommend the following steps:

- In small groups create a still image/tableaux that is inspired by the quote. Present the images to each other and discuss how the characters feel in the image and what their thoughts are concerning what is happening in the image.
- Develop these still images into active scenes. After showing the scenes to each other discuss what you think are some of the pressures facing the characters in the scenes. Identify what factors are influencing the decisions characters are making in the scene. What does this tell us about life in the West Indies at this time?

“My memory is of a huge placard somewhere in the city. It was very glowing: ‘Do you want to help the War cause? England needs you’, with a finger pointing at you. England, that great country needs me! It didn’t say that you needed to have so many Junior or Senior Cambridge certificates. It didn’t even say you had to be fit, just, - ‘Do you want to serve England, your Mother Country?’”

A volunteer soldier from the Caribbean.

“The response was terrific – overwhelming. In fact, recruitment was over-subscribed. Hundreds were turned away . . . All the ingredients for easy recruitment were present – the adverts in the press, the posters spread around the city, the excitement everywhere. Lots of boys were out of work at the time – only hanging around the streets with nothing to do”.

A volunteer soldier from the Caribbean.

“. . . the Germans used to broadcast a lot of propoganda to Jamaica and told us things like the British are only using the black people. It was discussed all over Kingston. Every corner you went people would discuss and talk about the war and many people said that they would not fight for Britain because Britain had enslaved us for a number of years and so on”

George Powe, a Jamaican Serviceman in World War Two.

“There was a writer called Roger Mais who published an article entitled, ‘Now We Know’; He was arrested because the article depicted British Imperialism in its naked form and . . . explained to the people why they should not fight for Britain. He quoted the experience of the Emperor Haile Selassie and the Italian intervention in Africa. Many people were concerned about this and said that we should not fight.”

George Powe, a Jamaican Serviceman in World War Two

“ I did not think that playing my part in the war would gain me nothing. True, Britain was in control of Guyana and the entire West Indies at the time and certain aspects of their stewardship was far from fair. But nothing that Hitler or Mussolini did at that time suggested to me that life under them would have been any easier. Indeed, Hitler’s treatment of the African-American athlete, Jesse Owens, after the 1936 Olympics in Berlin did not at all imbue me with confidence. This coupled with patriotism was where I stood”.

Robert Murray, a West Indian Serviceman in World War Two

“I remember picking up a copy of *The Gleaner* newspaper. I came across a part where Hitler described black people as ‘having no use’. I really got annoyed at this man and his Master Race Theory. I decided I was going to move things round personally. That was my decision and that was why I enlisted. My attitude towards the war was that Britain was in trouble. We had a strong Commonwealth and if everybody in the Commonwealth pulled together we would settle the question. I, at no time, had any doubt that we would need every man and woman whom we could muster”.

Dudley Thompson a West Indian Serviceman in World War Two

In the quotes on the previous pages the Servicemen make reference to the people and events outlined below. From the brief descriptions and biographies why do you think these factors were so influential in shaping the Servicemen's decisions to join the British Armed Services?



Emperor Haile Selassie

Selassie abolished slavery and worked to modernize Ethiopia. In 1935 the country was invaded by Italy. Selassie personally led his troops into battle, but the Ethiopians were overwhelmed and eventually the emperor was forced to flee the country. His powerful appeal for help to the League of Nations attracted worldwide sympathy, but failed to spur the League to action. At last, in 1941, with the help of the British, Selassie returned home and regained his throne.

The Rastafarian religion arose in Jamaica in the 20th century. Its name is derived from Emperor Haile Selassie's original name, Ras Tafari. There is no single central Rastafarian church, but in general Rastafarians believe that Haile Selassie was the Messiah and that Africa, especially Ethiopia, is heaven on earth. These beliefs are based in part on interpretations of Old Testament prophecies. Haile Selassie himself was Christian and not a Rastafarian.



Jesse Owens and the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin

Owens' story is one of a high-profile sports star making a statement that transcended athletics, spilling over into the world of global politics. Berlin, on the verge of World War II, was bristling with Nazism, red-and-black swastikas flying everywhere. Brown-shirted Storm Troopers goose-stepped while Adolf Hitler postured, harangued, threatened. A montage of evil was played over the chillingly familiar Nazi anthem: "Deutschland Uber Alles."

This was the background for the 1936 Olympics. When Owens finished competing, the African-American son of a sharecropper and the grandson of slaves had single-handedly crushed Hitler's myth of Aryan supremacy.

He gave four virtuoso performances, winning gold medals in the 100- and 200- meter dashes, the long jump and on America's 4x100 relay team. Score it: Owens 4, Hitler 0.

A remarkably even-keeled and magnanimous human being, Owens never rubbed it in. Just as sure as he knew fascism was evil, he also knew his country had a ways to go too in improving life for African-Americans.

"When I came back to my native country, after all the stories about Hitler, I couldn't ride in the front of the bus," Owens said. "I had to go to the back door. I couldn't live where I wanted. I wasn't invited to shake hands with Hitler, but I wasn't invited to the White House to shake hands with the President, either."



Adolf Hitler and his theory of the *Master Race*

Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany during the 1920s and early 1930s at a time of social, political and economic upheaval. Once in power he 'eliminated' all opposition and launched an ambitious program of world domination, which included his programme to 'eliminate' all Jewish people. In his book 'Mein Kampf' he developed his Nazi ideology and his ideas on the 'Master Race', where he argued that people of 'Germanic' and 'Nordic' origins represented an 'ideal' or 'pure race'. He outlined a hierarchy of races in which white Europeans were at the top and Black Africans and Australian Aborigines were at the bottom.



Mussolini and the Italian Intervention in Ethiopia

Benito Mussolini created a fascist state through the use of state terror and propaganda. Using his charisma, total control of the media and intimidation of political rivals, he disassembled the existing democratic government system. His entry into World War II on the side of Nazi Germany made Italy a target for Allied attacks and ultimately led to his downfall and death.

In 1935, seeking to expand the Italian Empire in eastern Africa, Mussolini ordered the invasion of Ethiopia on 3 October. During the ensuing seven-month campaign the Italian forces used chemical weapons and air power to defeat the Ethiopians, tens of thousands of civilian Ethiopians were killed.. Mussolini announced the Italian victory to a jubilant crowd of 400,000 in Rome on 9 May. In 1937, following a failed assassination attempt on the Italian colonial governor, 30,000 Ethiopians are executed.

Independence for Trinidad

Three significant People



Uriah Butler: Labour leader and politician.

Uriah Butler was born in Grenada and as a young man he enlisted for the front during World War One. After the war was over, he returned to Grenada for a while, and then in January 1921 he moved to Trinidad. Uriah Butler became a strong supporter of the pro-worker efforts then being made by the former captain of the British West India Regiment, Arthur Andrew Cipriani and joined the La Brea branch of Captain Cipriani's Trinidad Labour Party. But he became increasingly dissatisfied with what he regarded as Cipriani's "gentle" approach, and living as he did in the oilbelt at Fyzabad, he began serious agitation for the rights of oil workers.

His confrontation with oil employers grew until in 1935 he led a hunger march at Apex oilfields, Fyzabad, aimed at getting better conditions for the oilfield workers. Now, having frequent disagreements with Captain Cipriani, whom he accused of "somersaulting and back pedalling," he resigned from the Trinidad Labour Party. This was in July 1936, and in that same month he formed the British Empire Workers' and Citizens' Home Rule Party.

His agitation became more and more militant, and in May 1937, because of the alleged contents of a speech he had made to workers at Fyzabad, he was arrested and charged with inciting to riot and with sedition. He was summoned for June 14 but failed to appear, and a few days later, June 19, 1937, police tried to arrest him while he was making a speech to workers at Fyzabad, his followers resisted his arrest, and bloody riots broke out.

A police inspector was fatally shot, and a corporal was burned to death. What followed those riot known as the Butler Riots, or Oilfield Riots, was widespread social unrest, especially in the oil areas. Butler, who was sought frantically by the police, went into hiding after the turmoil but gave himself up on September 9th, 1937. His trial lasted from November 25 to December 16. He was freed of the charge of sedition but was jailed for two years with hard labour on the charge of inciting to riot.

He served his sentence, but when World War Two broke out in September 1939, he was re-arrested and detained as a security risk under the Defense Regulations. He spent six years in detention on Caledonia Island, not being released until the war was over in 1945. Still enjoying extraordinary popular support and public sympathy at the time of his release, he thereafter went into active politics.

There was high hopes for him at the first adult franchise elections of 1946, but Butler was distracted by a Port-of-Spain, politician, Albert Gomes, who had criticized him. Thus, instead of contesting a seat in the oil belt where he had become a legendary figure, Butler attempted to "teach Albert Gomes a lesson" by challenging Gomes for the seat of Port-of-Spain North. In that constituency, essential Belmont, Gomes was an extremely popular figure, and the result was a humiliating defeat for Butler.

Toward the end of 1946, there was a flare-up of industrial unrest in the country, and this unrest was attributed to butler. The unrest reached crisis proportions when on January 22, 1947, followers of Butler who had crowded into Port-of-Spain, stormed the Red House. Port-of-Spain dock workers as well as public service worker were on strike, while in the oilfields the situation was critical, with rioting on the streets of Fyzabad and Point Fortin. The Carnival, which was scheduled to take place on February 17 & 18, barely escaped being banned. Butler continued his industrial agitation and did not turn away from the political fray.

He formed the Butler party and at the general elections of 1950, he of course fought in the oil belt and duly won the seat to represent St. Patrick West in the Legislative Council. His part won six seats, against two each by the other three parties, and there were six Independents. He retained his seat at the following general elections in 1956 but suffer another crushing electoral defeat in the general elections of 1961, fighting for the seat of La Brea, for by that time the aura he gained by his agitation for the workers in 1937 had worn off.

However, when the country gained independence in 1962, Butler's contribution as a labour leader, and his reputation as a fighter for the masses took on special significance. He was regarded as a hero of the people, and in fact, he was seen as the man who struck the first damaging blow against colonialism, thus giving courage to the fighters for independence.

In recognition of this, Butler was in 1970 decorated with the country's highest award, the Trinity Cross. But the greatest tribute of all came in 1973, when the anniversary of the oilfield riots, June 19, was declared an annual national holiday and celebrated as Labour Day. Butler died on February 20, 1977. The former Princess Margaret Highway has since been renamed in his honour. 1921 had hardly dawned when a man destined to "shake up" the country and inspire so much change that the country could never be the same again had arrived in Trinidad. Uriah Butler limped off the steamer onto St Vincent wharf, Port of Spain.



Arthur Andrew Cipriani : A man of the people

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Henry Cipriani, of Corsican and French stock, Arthur Andrew Cipriani was born in Trinidad on January 31, 1878. His parents had arrived in Trinidad in the middle of the 19th century and set up an agricultural business in the city. Family of the well-known Agostinis, also early settlers in Trinidad, the Ciprianis developed their business with success. Arthur, one of three sons, was relatively bright and inquisitive. He attended St Mary's College where he did rather well without being island-scholar material. And he followed from his teen years he exploits of his family in agriculture and later on, in politics, commerce and sport.

A changing society around him prompted Arthur to make a choice from a young age to serve his country on other fronts. Political configurations were now becoming clear and defined in the early 1900s and he took a great interest in such proceedings. But he also found time to look at working and living conditions among the poor.

While he was a successful cocoa planter and as such an employer, Cipriani never saw himself as a lord of the manor, barking orders to his plantation workers. Instead he made working conditions as comfortable as possible for his employees. But while this transpired the First World War began.

Cipriani made overtures to the local and overseas authorities for the British colonies to have a regiment of West Indian soldiers to join the campaign. It was at first rejected. But he continued to argue that the men of the region were no less loyal in laying down their lives for the British Empire than the British homegrown troops.

It was a magnificent one-man crusade and he expressed his integrity and commitment in no less a manner than placing his name at the top of the list when the decision was made in 1915 by the colonial authorities for West Indian troops to be at last sent to the battle front.

Playing his part through superb conduct, leadership and recording of feats and events of the West Indian fighting men, Cipriani distinguished himself emphatically. It was clear from that moment he was destined to take a lead in other spheres in the development of Trinidad and Tobago. His rank in the military was well established and following his return Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani was a household name every citizen of the country knew, repeated, admired and respected. In trade union business, commerce, politics, sport and civil matters it was Captain Cipriani. And this elevated position as a wartime leader and a distinguished legislator and city father never allowed Cipriani to turn away from those who were in need and hard-pressed to survive in a colony grappling with disadvantages.

He said in the Legislative Council in 1941 when the Second World War was at its worst: "In this country, in these hard times when everybody shouts from the hill-tops that they are hard up, that there is no money and that times are hard...and I hear my friend, the capitalist, playing his usual role of a stuck pig whenever you hold a knife to him, I think of the poor devil who is going about without a meal. It is true, that the old age pensioner has no longer the use of his teeth to masticate the food that you and I live on, but he can well live on slops; and who is to provide it? Government in its position, Sir, ought to take care of old people and the poor, instead of making it difficult for them to exist."

Cipriani became a city councillor in 1921 and remained in that status and later, a member of the Legislative Council and Executive council until 1945.

In 1929 he was made mayor of Port-of-Spain and served in that capacity until 1940, eight terms of unbroken service. No one was a more popular and respected city father than the captain, aging in the early 1940s but still with a sharp tongue, yet mild manner, clear perspectives and remarkable service to the people of the capital of Port-of-Spain and other areas.

He had formed his own Trinidad Labour Party in 1919 of which he became President General and took trade unionism to tremendous heights and status, now lost forever, where discipline and negotiations were classic inscriptions in our history.

It was no surprise that Cipriani served on several important committees down the years and his presence on such organizations provided them with distinction, integrity and success.

But Cipriani was not just a respected personality in Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, he was regarded as a distinguished figure throughout the West Indies and the British Commonwealth.

A true West Indian, Cipriani also believed that men born in this colony had the capability to respond successfully to any call. As far back as 1932 he told members of the Legislative Council: "I submit that appointments in the service should be confined to local men, provided always that local men have the ability and qualifications necessary. And when I say 'local man' I refer to the broad term 'West Indian'."

But the great warrior, loved and honoured far and wide, had extended his efforts to great effect and by the last days of World War Two he had become tired and at times, disillusioned. On April 18, 1945, Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani died. It was one of the saddest days in our history as the great man was mourned at a funeral that brought out the masses.

His monument placed years after at the bottom of Independence Square, Port-of-Spain, diametrically links the four cardinal points of the city, a most appropriate revelation. It is called, and rightly so, the Cipriani Roundabout.

Perhaps a most fitting tribute came years later from the then Chief Minister of Jamaica, Norman Manley, when he said: "It is fitting that posterity should acclaim not only for the credit history must inevitable concede him but that in the West Indies Federal Capital itself future generations should see in his statue a permanent reminder of the man and his works."



Dr Eric Williams : The first Prime Minister of Trinidad

Born on September 25, 1911, Eric Williams was the son of Elisa and Henry Williams, a minor Post Office official in Trinidad. He was educated at Queen's Royal College and won the Island Scholarship to Oxford University. At Oxford, he was placed first in the First Class of the History Honours School and received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1938. His doctoral thesis, *The Economic Aspect of the West Indian Slave Trade and Slavery*, was considered an important contribution to research on the subject and was published in 1944 in Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*. Much of Williams' educational pursuits at Queen's Royal College and Oxford University are documented in his book, *Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister*.

In 1939, Williams migrated to the United States to teach at Howard University. He became an assistant professor of social and political sciences and organized several courses, especially a humanities course for which he developed a three-volume work called *Documents Illustrating the Development of Civilization* (1947). While at Howard, Williams began to work as a consultant to the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission, a body set up after the war to study the future of the region. In 1948, he left Howard to head the Research Branch of the Caribbean Commission. He later (1955) resigned from the Commission in protest against its crypto-colonialist policies.

Williams returned to Trinidad and Tobago and became more involved in politics. His first major political speech was titled *My Relations with the Caribbean Commission* (1955). A year later, Williams formed the People's National Movement (PNM), a political party of which he became the leader. In September of 1956, the PNM won the national elections and he became the chief minister of the country from 1956 to 1959, premier from 1959 to 1962, and prime minister from 1962 to 1981. During his term as prime minister, Williams led Trinidad and Tobago into the Federation of the West Indies and to independence within the Commonwealth in 1962. Williams died in office on March 29, 1981. Often called the "Father of the Nation," Williams remains one of the most significant leaders in the history of modern Trinidad and Tobago

ACTS OF LOVE

A contemporary exploration of Chekhov's core themes and ideas in *Three Sisters*.



An Interview with Dystin Johnson: Writer

Q: Where did you draw your inspiration from to write this piece?

A: Why decide to retell the adulterous story of Vershinin and Masha? Often artistic choices are mysterious to the creator, I know I was drawn to Masha's coolness in contrast to Vershinin's pomposity; her pessimism in contrast to his optimism; their perceived autonomies and restrictions; but mostly I was attracted to the old adage that, 'you can't choose who you fall in love with'. Moreover, the eternal battle between faith and science for our inexhaustible need to know 'why?' – that is, why we are here – will always be a source of artistic as well as scientific endeavour. Maria and Alex's naive attempts to define this complex philosophical question are charming as well as derisory, particularly as their attitudes and behaviours are often contradictory. So, in this 'composition' (as Chekhov's plays are often described) I have simply taken Masha and Vershinin's conversations and deepened them into private moments, contemporised the setting and then leapt into an imaginative interpretation.

Q: How influenced were you by Chekhov's original?

A: I have tried to stick faithfully to the varied themes Chekhov was exploring in *Three Sisters* and the style in which he choose to do so. Of course, to simplify these huge ideas, however universal, into a short modern play is a challenge; following Chekhov's simplicity of language is one thing, but to delineate the philosophises of a whole naturalistic movement...! The ideas of 'existence' and 'non-existence' which tend to be treated in the play as equivalences displayed in repetitive actions or statements such as "It doesn't matter", and "It's all the same", are hard enough to grasp let alone recreate. I understand that a writer has the ability and freedom to use warranted dramatic licence, but I hold true to the belief that if Anton were over my shoulder as I write, I would wish him to be nodding with concurrence and not shuddering in horror! I hope the modernity of this 'reconstruction' has not damaged Chekhov's intentions.

Q: Describe how your new setting works.

A: Vershinin and Masha have been relocated to the present with Alex and Maria. The social 'breakdown' of the town, the family and the individual, portrayed here in Russia's burgeoning 20th Century, will of course have different resonances to England's new 21st Century. So to cover these points: The suggestion for a social need to break the bourgeois Russian tradition of indolence, can tentatively be contrasted not only with our ever sprawling middle-class, but also to the increasing number of their university educated offspring who then graduate into a workforce sodden with postgraduates and all too often find little to inspire them; their apathetic counterparts who, deciding not to choose

further formal education, are largely forgotten and unsupported by our society. Also I suggest that a currently depoliticised population is craving, as Arthur Miller described Chekhov's plays, a 'natural eruption[s] of mankind's will to evolve.' That is, a demand for shake up of the middle-class conscience. Among other things, I hope the play suggests a certain conservative apathy worthy of criticism, considering our recent history it particularly saddens me whenever I see people of colour with this complexity. It is suggested that Anton Chekhov, did not necessarily adhere to his characters ideologies, I certainly believe that all good playwrights should encompass this viewpoint.

Q: When I read *Acts of Love* it reminded me of the recent closure of Birmingham's Longbridge car plant. Did you have a specific location in mind for where the play is set?

A: *Three Sisters* is set in an unspecified provincial garrison town; it is hard for us today to understand what the devastating impact of the soldier's leaving will have on the town, Andrey says "the town's going to be deserted. It's like a candle being snuffed out." (Interestingly Kulygin says, "...everything will go back to the way it was") However, having lived near Wallsend in Tyne and Wear during the threat and eventual move towards closure of the shipyard 'Swan Hunter', I understand a town's fear of its financial, cultural, physical and emotional lifeblood being drained. Of course, there are many towns in the UK built upon and sustained by a single industry, from coastal fishing villages to mining towns, which have also felt the heavy blow of social change. I decided to set *Acts of Love* in an unspecified small town, whose economic lifeblood is one industry. (Not a million miles from Dagenham in Essex, or Longbridge near Birmingham).

Q: How did you select what part of the original play to concentrate on?

A: Much has been written in the way of comment regarding the sister's themselves and their family. Luckily the dynamics of group of characters in the play allowed me to choose and lose those who would and would not enhance the telling of the lives of Maria and Alex. The immediate siblings, Rina (Irina), Olivia (Olga), Andrew (Andrey), his wife Natalie (Natasha) and Maria's husband and Alex's family were a great source of external storytelling. Chekhov's play's are dominated by offstage presences and unseen external worlds where more 'significant' action is happening. I have tried to make the influences of these characters – and in fact those offstage dramas – as strong as if there were other players on stage with them.

Interestingly, although the exploration of wider social and family constraints may alter over time, the individual's passage through moral dilemma remains the same; personal relations of love and their complications seem in the original play to be those of today. Maria is in the shadow of bereavement, Alex is plagued by a difficult marriage; (does the repetition of his dialogue suggest a repetition of behaviour?) loyalty, disloyalty, passion, guilt, hope and resignation are age old themes surrounding all acts of love.

Q: How do you think your modern day telling will be received?

A: As *Three Sisters* was written specifically for the actor's in Stanislavski's company in Moscow, the 'fleshing out' of the internal motivations of the characters, the threads of relationships between those around them prompted clearly by the text, is part of the secret in making Chekhovian 'composition' vital and alive to an audience. A 20th Century theatregoer wasn't used to such subtlety and his plays were wholly rejected at first. Today, in a narrative led TV culture I wonder whether the reception may be the same?

(This extract is reproduced by kind permission of the writer Dystin Johnson)

This extract is from Act Three and takes its inspiration from the conversation between Vershinin and Masha in which he speculates what life will be like in two to three hundred years. In Dystin Johnson's version instead of a large fire taking place in the local town, as happens in the original, a bomb has gone off in their local town and Maria is desperate to get hold of her sister.

It has been established previously that Alex's marriage (like Vershinin's) is an unhappy one, and that he worries about his wife's ability to take care of his two daughters when he is away from home. Maria's character shares a number of similarities to Masha's, her early marriage, at the age of 18, to a local school teacher has not proved successful and she feels detached and alienated from the world around her. However, her affair with Alex has given her a new zest of energy.

MARIA: This has to be the crappiest day, ever.

ALEX: The absolute crappiest, yes. *(beat)* After the police and ambulances arrived I went straight home. I turned the corner and there's the house exactly the same, but the girls were sitting on the front step - in bare feet - their mother nowhere to be seen. "She's gone for a walk". The looks on their faces. I dunno, their little faces - my heart literally tightened. Christ! I thought, what will my sweet little girls have to deal with in their lives?

Maria closes her eyes. He kisses her forehead.

When you think about it though-

MARIA: When you 'think it out' -

ALEX: When you 'think it out', the papers tomorrow will say, "What have things come to?". The 'talk-talk-talkers' will be like, "Things were so much better yesterday!". Rubbish! When you look back at all the wars or all the other ways we've found to be barbaric to each other, there *is* an enormous difference, life *is* better now. And, of course - in two or three hundred years time, they won't make the same mistake - *they will see* - they'll look back and laugh! All of this will seem ridiculous, because... because... Oh, what a life it's going to be! What a life!

MARIA: You're mad.

ALEX: Just imagine it; society will be better than now, our willing it to be so *will make it so!* You and I in turn will be relegated to the past and there will arise people who are better than us. Progress! Progress! *(laughs)* Christ, this mood I'm in! I want to... I need... *(he holds out his hand to her)* Come on, dance with me!

MARIA: What??

ALEX: Come on.

He begins to sing Robbie William's 'FEEL'

ALEX: 'Come on hold my hand / I wanna contact the living / Not sure I understand / this road I've been given

As he sings she takes his hand and he pulls her into him, they dance.

ALEX: I sit and talk to God / And he just laughs at my plans / My head speaks a language / I don't understand / I just wanna feel real love / feel the home that I live in /

Maria joins in

BOTH: cos I got too much blood / running thro' my veins / going to waste / I don't wanna die / but I ain't keen on living either / before I fall in love / I preparing to leave her / I scare myself to death / that's why I keep on running / Before I've arrived / I can see myself coming

The song builds in energy and pace with a kind of hysteria as they laugh, circumstances forcing them to dance and sing

BOTH: I just need to feel real love! / feel the home that I live in / cos I got too much love running thro' my veins / going to waste! / I need to feel real love and a love ever after! / I cannot get enough

They collapse together laughing.

MARIA: 'But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack/From my first entrance in,/Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,/If I lack'd any thing.//A guest, I anwer'd, worthy to be here:/Love said, you shall be he./I the unkinde, ungrateful? Ah my deare./I cannot look on thee.

Pause.

ALEX: Some of us from work are going for a drink, I should go.

A text comes through on Maria's 'phone.

MARIA: A text! I've got a signal. *(Tuts, then reads)* 'Let me know your safe. I love you. Seven years and I'm still happy, so happy' *(closes 'phone)* And I'm bored, so bored. *(beat)* D'you want to know something that's really winding me up?

ALEX:I think you're going to tell me-

MARIA: Andrew has re-mortgaged the house. It's not even his, it belongs to all four of us! To make matters worse *she* is spending money left right and centre: "...but little Robbie *needs* a good buggy", not one that costs a fortune and looks like a mini version of their bloody 4x4! "Well, I might start jogging in the park with some of the other mothers". My arse! 'Jogging' to that other bloke she's been seeing, more like.

ALEX: What can Andrew do? He owes money, if you can't sell the house-

MARIA: He thinks we don't know, it's outrageous!

ALEX: Ask him for your share-

MARIA: Oh, I don't need anything, it's just totally unfair.

ALEX: (*Kissing her*) You're exhausted, I'm going. I'm going for a drink.

He leaves her with a kiss and goes.

Classroom Exercises

After familiarising yourself with Chekhov's original Act 3 make your own appraisal of how well you think this new version with its contemporary setting works. Consider specifically;

- How are the characters similar to the original and how are they different?
- Where has Dystin Johnson been completely original? Do these sections work in your opinion?

Drama Exercises

Firstly, in small groups, with some students performing and some students directing, have a go at acting through the scene extract.

- Making reference to a different section of Chekhov's original, either building upon Dystin Johnson's ideas or developing your own, create a short contemporary interpretation. Your aim is to remain true to the 'feeling' and 'philosophy' of the original scene extract.
- Dystin weaves a poem by George Herbert and a song by Robbie Williams into her dialogue. Can you think of a contemporary song, poem or slogan that lyrically illustrates how the characters feel in your extract?

What inspired you to adapt *Three Sisters* by Chekhov?

I went to the arts council with the idea to adapt a classic, and on the list was *Three Sisters*. My mother was one of four sisters, who grew up in a bourgeoisie, middle class life in Trinidad. She also had one brother whose life was dysfunctional. His wife had left him for a lesbian, which in Trinidad at that time was a scandal. So he drank a lot and lived in a garage. He was a handy man, so he lived in a garage, and whenever the family had a social party with their friends, he would come out of the garage and expose the family secrets.

I grew up on that level of society in Trinidad. My mother and I used to gossip, she would tell me stories about the goings on about the other couples and families in the area. So the whole sense of social interaction on that level, adultery and fears was quite familiar to me. So I was able to draw upon my experiences when adapting *Three Sisters*.

Three Sisters is about three sisters and a son from a bourgeoisie, middle class background with upper middle class pretensions in Trinidad. They are quite well educated and they see themselves as saintly. I got this inspiration from my mother too. People who live on that level of society help the poor by giving them jobs to do and food if they passed, its part of the culture. If you are from a higher level in society, you are required to help the poor.

In 1988, you adapted Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and called it *Trinidad's Sisters*. How successful do you feel that was?

I wasn't satisfied with it. I feel I paid too much respect to the original. I did that with a previous adaptation of mine, called *Play Boy*, and it worked. However, I don't believe it did with *Trinidad Sisters*. Maybe I stuck too close to the original script, which I possibly didn't do with *Play Boy*.

Trinidad Sisters had some wonderful moments in it, but I wasn't one hundred percent happy with it. That's why I was pleased to have the opportunity to have another bite at it. Writing for this adaptation for Eclipse Theatre has given me a wonderful opportunity to write an adaptation that I am happier with.

How does the new *Three Sisters* differ to *Trinidad's Sisters*?

It's more modern and more sophisticated and it's more honest of the period. The Chekhov version is more repressed. *Three Sisters* is more open and honest to the emotions and the relationships. I really enjoyed doing that.

It's a much shorter, more direct, exciting and accessible adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, how did this new adaptation develop?

I think it springs from not trying to follow the original too much and create a Caribbean version. These are gentle, respectable women, but what goes on behind the curtains and behind the nice polite facade is another story. It's a story of longing; both their parents are dead. The eldest of the sisters is a middle class spinster, who is resigned to spinsterhood. The middle sister is Helen. She is going through a period where she is dissatisfied with her husband. He is busy doing the politics bit, he is ambitious and wants to make money. She has a sensitive nature and is quite sophisticated. She is interested in abstract and metropolitan ideas. Then we have the younger sister, who is the eternal optimist. She wants to go back to Cambridge to live because she has such wonderful memories of it. They live a very Trinidadian life, where they have social occasions where people come and drink, eat and converse in sophisticated ways that they think is entertaining. Peter the brother disgraces his family. His wife is from working class origins and brings shame upon the family. I like the idea of her in fancy, expensive dresses. She has a boyfriend who will be paying for these dresses because the brother, her husband, has no money. Because of this situation he is in he hits the bottle, borrows money and gambles. He is in denial of the situation he is in and this is how he copes with it. This discredits the family's reputation because of guilt by association.

It is basically a story of these three sisters and their brother who is bright and promising, but a flawed genius. He gets married to the wrong chick, she goes off with another guy, and so he is self-destructive. He hits the bottle, gambles and borrows money, which is a huge disgrace to the family. What emerges in this new version, is the family come together in the end and they keep their house.

There is a great deal of humour in your work, how is the culture of Trinidadians and Chekhov's work linked?

Trinidadians like humour and humorous in people. In a way this links Chekhov to the Trinidadians with relation to what Trinidadians find absurd or wrong. There is the link with Chekhov's gentility, and the idea that you have to provide a respectable front, which Trinidadians are very good at. There is always the chink in the armour, which brings the humour aspect because of this opposition to proper behaviour.

There is a slightly distorted perspective on World War Two taught in schools. Its not widely known how Trinidadians helped and volunteered to help England win the war, how do you feel you were able to help educate your audience?

Trinidadians volunteered to go to England to help the UK in the RAF. There was a West Indian regiment. It was a wonderful opportunity to show how the Trinidadians helped England to win the war, without preaching to an audience.

How do you think this production will go?

I think it will go very well, because one of the things that I had in mind when working on it was the importance of making it more accessible to a young audience. When going to see the performances of *Play Boy*, I realised how many young people were present in the audience. I have wrote it for the whole of the UK. I am not depending upon an audience that know the original; therefore it is accessible to a wider audience.

Interview with Paulette Randall, Director of *Three Sisters*

HU: Hanneke Uvieghara, Assistant Director, *Three Sisters*

PR: Paulette Randall, Director, *Three Sisters*

HU: My first question is about your working relationship with the writer, Mustapha Matura. Can you tell me a bit about how you've worked together?

PR: In truth I wish I'd spent more time with Mustapha because he's a wonderful writer, and he's someone that I've wanted to work with for a very long time. We spoke on the phone quite a bit because originally the play was done fourteen years ago. It was commissioned by the Tricycle Theatre by Nicholas Kent, the Artistic Director there. It was done at the Donmar Warehouse because it was Tricycle the theatre had had a fire and so they were in transit really, and had to find other places to do their work. So the production was mounted at the Donmar Warehouse by Nicholas Kent. It was much longer with a bigger cast, so when it was proposed that it was going to be done by Eclipse, the first thing that Steven Luckie - the Producer - said was that it had to be with a smaller cast because it would be far too expensive to tour with such a big company. So that was the first thing that Mustapha had to do - to go back to it and rewrite it with a smaller cast in mind, but actually he found it quite a challenge and enjoyed doing it. He said that a lot of the time you don't get the chance to re-look at your work, and maybe think of doing it another way. I'd never seen the play, and in fact I'd never seen a production of *Three Sisters*, so for me it was a completely new experience coming to the play.

HU: So you went through and talked about different aspects of the play...

PR: Yes, we talked about what areas worked and where I felt it didn't work, and I think we're probably on draft four, possibly even five.

HU: And he's been in the rehearsal process hasn't he?

PR: Yes, he was here the first week, which was fantastic, for him to be with us every day. In the last few plays that I've done, none of the writers have been alive, so it's great to have a living writer in the room, because you can just completely exhaust them. It's funny though because sometimes writers don't really realise what they've written so you ask them questions, thinking that you're going to get the definitive answer, and actually they go "I don't know, I don't know why they've said that."

HU: You've got a designer working with you on this production. Can you tell me a bit about that process?

PR: This is a designer I've worked with regularly for the last three or so years, and we have a nice way of working together I think. So we read the play and just started talking about what we felt it would look like. We knew that it's a middle class family, set in Trinidad, during the Second World War, so we both had the idea that we'd do a grand house that would now be decaying. I've been to Trinidad and so had the designer - we went together in fact - so for us to be given this play was wonderful because we'd seen a lot of those old houses. So we were really quite clear about what that house could possibly look like. Otherwise you would go out and do your normal research (well certainly Libby [Watson] as the designer would do much more of that), I would probably talk to her about - having been to the Caribbean before - the kinds of colours that you would expect to see, and the wooden floors, all that kind of stuff. How it looks is decided between us, but the real detail is down to her.

HU: Can you describe your approach to directing *Three Sisters*?

PR: I always find this difficult to answer. I'm beginning to understand how I work; I know I've been doing this for a while now but I've never really understood quite what my 'method' is. I think it's based on my parents' cultural background, which is a story telling background, so I go from that really. I use stories as a way of going into characters and therefore how you tell the story of the play.

HU: Do you use stories to pull the plot out?

PR: Or to focus on characters more - I think it's about discovering who these people are through stories, and getting the actors to tell stories to find a way into their characters or the situation they're in.

HU: Looking at some of the themes in *Three Sisters*, can you talk about how some of these themes might have relevance in contemporary society now?

PR: I think if you're telling a universal story about people and their lives it will always resonate with an audience. I've just recently done a play that was set in 1904. This is now set in 1941, 1942. It's about people and their lives. There will always be stories that we can connect with. We can watch science fiction that's set in the year 2424 and we can still connect with that. My parents came from the Caribbean and lived in England, but always had a longing and desire to go back home. My mother eventually did that. My father never did through illness, but there was always that longing of wanting to go back. So they lived in the past and the future but never in the present. I think that's what most of our characters are doing in the play, and I think there's lots of people that can identify with that - any immigrant culture can identify with it but also people that are in a situation where they don't feel happy being in the present; where their past has left a memory and they hope the future is going to be better than where they are right now. Quite a lot of people can relate to that, even if it's just momentarily.

HU: They're in some way not whole and looking for that

PR: Yes, it's the pursuit of happiness – if your relationship's not going well, if work's not going well, if your health isn't good. All those sort of things that right now may be making you unhappy, and you can look back to a day when it was better or you look forward to a day when it will be better. I try to live in the present. I don't always do it, but I try.

HU: The human condition?

PR: Yes, absolutely

HU: Who or what has acted as an influence on your work?

PR: I think in terms of my work I've been influenced by all sorts of people and all sorts of things. Primarily I think my parents have played a huge part in who I am and what I am. And my sister as well has played an enormous part in what's made me me. We were quite blessed in being incredibly close and able to really talk and acknowledge our love for each other, which is sometimes painful, but I think that's apt. And then there have been other people in my life – friends, family, writers that I've worked with. Most notably people like August Wilson, Linda Grogan, Sarah Daniels, Ralph Brown, an actor who's played a huge part in my life who's also one of my best friends. Actors like Jenny Jules, Eammon Walker, Jo Martin, who are writers, actors and just incredible human beings. Other directors like Felix Cross who's also an amazing musician and writer. Sometimes it's a film I've seen or a gallery exhibition I've been to, music that I've listened to. All of these things play a huge part. If you profess to be an artist or that's what you're in the pursuit of being, then you have to look for all of those places where you can be influenced and enthused and excited. At the moment I'm being inspired by the cast of *Three Sisters*, and it's wonderful.

Interview with Ben Bennett & Tracey Saunders, Actors in The REP's productions of *Acts of Love* and *Three Sisters*

JR: Juliet Raynsford, Education officer at The Birmingham Rep

TS: Tracey Saunders, Actor playing the characters of Jean in *Three Sisters* and Maria in *Acts of Love*

BB: Ben Bennett, Actor playing the characters of Scott in *Three Sisters* and Alex in *Acts of Love*

JR: Can you tell me a bit about *Acts of Love*? What's your take on what it's about?

TS: It's an adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, written by Dystin Johnson...

BB: Well, specifically a modern take on the relationship between Masha and Vershinin; the "adulterous affair" I think Dystin calls it in the introduction. It's been brought up to the modern day and reset in any small town, and explores the lives of these two people and their relationship.

JR: So Dystin's tried to make it quite topical?

TS: Yes, it mentions the London bombings last summer

BB: It deals with the idea of industry and the loss of industry and the effect that has on the population of a city or a town.

JR: It's not set in Birmingham is it?

TS: It's set in any sort of industrial small town or city really, not just Birmingham, it could be anywhere in the country.

BB: Yes, because I think what it's trying to do is look at how universal these issues can be, how they can affect people no matter what the industry is. Also the fact that love comes into everyone's life at some point, and how that affects us and how we deal with that, and the consequences of it, depending on whether it's someone you're supposed to be in love with or someone you're not.

JR: So it's based on Chekhov's original, but how would you describe Maria and Alex?

TS: I think Maria's a feisty person but she's lost her drive and her sense of belonging really. I think that's probably why the affair between them begins because she's searching for something. She's looking for some kind of excitement, someone else that she can talk to other than her husband.

JR: At the end, I think it's quite sad for Maria...

TS: She's asking herself all these questions. Alex has opened up this big can of worms and then just left her to it. She's left to try and resolve what she's going to go back to – whether she's going to go back to her life and continue as she is, or change.

JR: That's very Chekhovian, and I think that's a real success on Dystin's part to create such a short play that raises those questions and provokes that...

BB: ...and manages to capture the sort of atmosphere that Chekhov would create in the style of the writing; the repetition of lines, the constant questioning of life...

JR: ...and time as well, because in the play it's quite open - time moves on, but sometimes you're not quite sure of how long the gaps are.

TS: You see the seasons change - most of it's set around the garden, and they go through Autumn, Spring, Summer and Winter

BB: Yes, it's environmentally correct, which often happens in Chekhov's plays.

JR: And you have to work out what you think has happened to them in between times, he just poses the question, you work it out.

BB: Yes, very much.

JR: Can you tell us about Alex?

BB: Alex I think is in a place where he's trying to figure out where he's going and what life's about. Both characters are in their mid twenties, and at 30 now I've had a three or even four year period of doing that myself as a person. You stop, and it's like a pit stop really, just to make sure you're on the right track. His marriage is not necessarily a happy marriage, and he's got two kids, but he's very much trying to analyse things and think things out, as he says in the script. I think for some people to stop and make sense of where they're going it's good, but I think that for some people it's not so good because they don't often have the options that other people have.

JR: It's interesting in terms of the impact of this love affair isn't it - whether it does strengthen them and strengthen their faith in life or whether it makes them go "there is no point, we can't be together and that's unfair"

TS: But these two people think they're both in unhappy marriages, and they have this time together which is good, and then both leave and go their separate ways. I'm not quite sure, I haven't worked out yet where Maria is, whether she goes back or not...

BB: Yes, it's left open - as you were saying he leaves and goes back to London and she finishes by saying "I'm going home" and it poses the question: what are you actually going to do, are you going to go back to where you were or are you going to make changes?

JR: Dystin [Johnson] wrote a play for another Eclipse production a play called *Three Tales of Courage* that was about child soldiers in West Africa and it was for a similar age group that we're going to perform to which is the, Year Ten to A Level sort of age range. As actors, how do you feel about taking a play to that age group? Why do you think this play is relevant to that age group?

BB: I think when you become an adult everyone stops asking questions, and I think that's dangerous. It is one of the most attractive things about children and young people in general that they're prepared to challenge the status quo.

TS: They haven't made their opinions on things yet. There's still room for discussion.

BB: I think hopefully most people get through their childhood and well into their teens before they (without being pessimistic) go off track, hopefully to come back on at some point. But if you can avoid going off track too seriously, you're set and the rest of your life can be quite smooth if you make sense of things and keep making sense of things. Personally I sometimes see a lot of people get into a routine in their late teens or early twenties and don't get out of that until their forties.

JR: Performing and going on tour with this play - what are you looking forward to?

BB: I'm looking forward to what people get from it, what it makes them ask, how it makes them think about their own lives. You're starting to think about those things in your teens, marriage and having kids. Some people have had kids by the time they're 15 or 16, so I think it's important for them to begin to discuss these things.

TS: It talks a lot about education, and the importance of education. Maria actually believes that she knows too much for this small town, and Alex thinks you can never know too much.

JR: That's a very strong theme in both plays isn't it, *Three Sisters* and *Acts of Love*, this idea that education can sometimes be a curse as well as a gift. In *Three Sisters* there's the whole idea of "there's no one to talk to in this town," it's part of that frustration isn't it?

BB: I've heard it said that knowledge is power, and I think it's a responsibility if you have a deep understanding of things, it's how you choose to use that and how you choose to allow that to connect with other people.

JR: In that respect, Dystin [Johnson] touches upon it, and *Three Sisters* touches upon it - the middle class problem of their aspirations getting stuck in some way. They feel like they're spiralling.

TS: Alex says - at sixteen most of us had babies or went to work on the factory floor, and those that did get the A Levels went to uni as far away as possible from this town; they have to get out. Maria talks about her younger sister, as she does get out into the world.

JR: In *Three Sisters*, Tracey, you're playing Jean, and Ben's playing Scott. Mustapha's [Mustapha Matura – Writer of the Eclipse Theatre's adaptation of Chekhov's original play] adaptation is different, but very true to the original. What I've found very interesting in preparing the education pack is the research on Trinidad around that time.

TS: A lot of people don't realise the people in the Caribbean were involved in the war.

JR: The scope of this production in terms of those themes will I think be really interesting. When preparing for your roles, how much of that research do you get into, or were you being led by Paulette? [Paulette Randall – Director of *Three Sisters*]

BB: It depends on the director, but I do think it's each individual actor's responsibility to find out their own things, to create a history for their character. So it's a mixture of drawing on extra information and using your imagination to come up with...

TS:... something that's true and that works for you, not just what other characters say about your own character's background.

JR: What the play taps into in the West Indies is the clash of feelings that results from the experience of wanting to fight for the motherland but not wanting to support oppressive British colonial rule.

BB: Yes, the question of "what do we get in return?" – the importance of pushing for independence and standing on your own two feet instead of taking handouts all the time.

Useful Websites:

The following websites deal with the involvement of the West Indies in World Wars One and Two:

BBC website pages:

World War One:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwone/west_indies_01.shtml

World War Two:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwtwo/colonies_colonials_03.shtml

Memorial Gates Trust website:

<http://www.mgtrust.org/car2.htm>

Further Reading:

A useful book for students is Andrea Levy's novel 'Small Island' (Review Books, 2005), which deals with the subjects of West Indian Servicemen in World War Two, and the conflicts caused by West Indians settling in Britain following the war. Chapter 30 of this book may be of particular interest and relevance, and could form the basis of a lesson on this subject.

'Lest we Forget – Experiences of West Indian Ex-Service Personnel in World War Two' – By Robert N Murray, produced in association with Nottingham West Indian Services Association (1996).