# LEARNING GUIDE - STAGING PUNCH

INSPIRED BY THE TRUE STORY

# PUNCH

BY

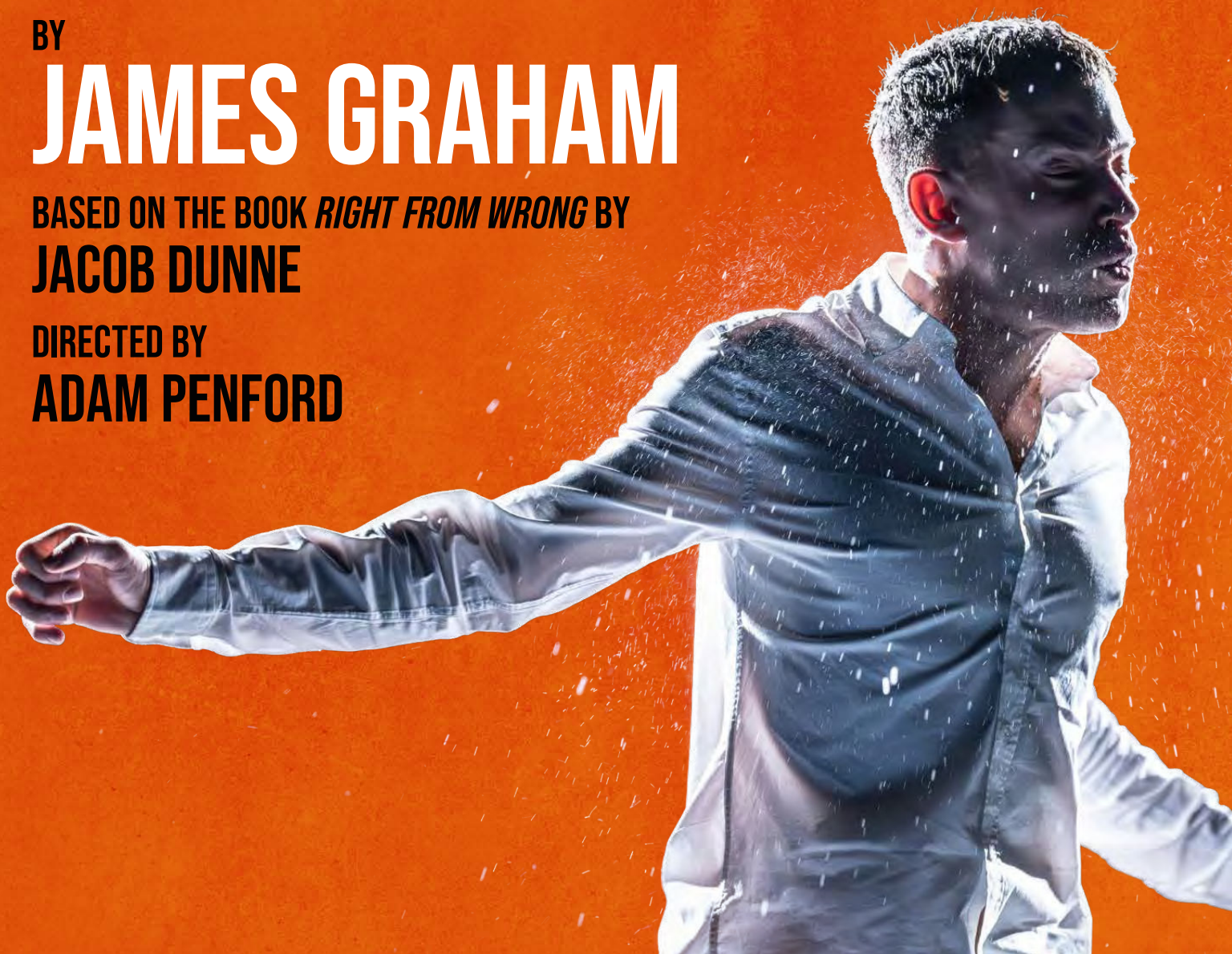
## JAMES GRAHAM

BASED ON THE BOOK *RIGHT FROM WRONG* BY

**JACOB DUNNE**

DIRECTED BY

**ADAM PENFORD**



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This guide was written by Susie Ferguson and commissioned by the West End production of *PUNCH* which played at the Apollo Theatre from 22 September - 29 November 2025. *PUNCH* was produced in the West End by KPPL Productions, Mark Gordon Pictures and Eilene Davidson Productions, in association with the Young Vic and Nica Burns.

*PUNCH* was commissioned by and premiered at Nottingham Playhouse in May 2024, and transferred to the Young Vic in March 2025.

With special thanks for their input into this guide: Alec Boaden, Alexandra Fay Braithwaite, Robbie Butler, Jacob Dunne, Anna Fleischle, Nicola Fowler, James Graham, Julie Hesmondhalgh, Tony Hirst, David Hodgkinson, Gavin Hudson, Shalisha James-Davis, Emma Pallant, Adam Penford, Leanne Pinder, Joan Scourfield, David Shields and everyone who made the production.

All production photography by Marc Brenner.

*PUNCH is dedicated to the memory of James Hodgkinson and all victims of one-punch. James dedicated his life to the helping and healing of others. His 28 years were a testament to his outlook and values - a volunteer, a mentor, a paramedic. He was loved by his family and friends, and gave love in return.*

*Theatre can and should be a restorative space of empathy, and increased understanding. We hope to honour and do justice to the man James was.*

**James Graham**

# ADAM PENFORD, DIRECTOR

I first heard Jacob's story when a colleague recommended that I listen to Jacob's BBC Radio 4 podcast. I can clearly date it to May 2020 as it was during the Covid pandemic, and the UK was in the first lockdown. At that time, when you couldn't see your loved ones, and it felt like society had ground to a halt, the very human story of Jacob, Joan and David really resonated. Theatre is about placing yourself in someone else's shoes, and the transformational story of *PUNCH*, which is about people learning to communicate and understand each other, is perfectly suited to the artform. It took 4 years to develop, with the brilliant James Graham writing, and the whole team at Nottingham Playhouse taking great care to work with the real-life people whose story we were telling. Alongside the play, a lot of wraparound work happened offstage, including building a Talking Circle, a temporary structure which sat outside the venue and hosted free panels with expert guests, exploring the themes of the play. The hope was that the production would spark conversation, build bridges and promote kindness. We're grateful to those who trusted us to tell their story.

*Talking Circle, designed by Imogen Melhuish.*

Adam Penford, Artistic Director at Nottingham Playhouse and Director of *PUNCH*

# JAMES GRAHAM, PLAYWRIGHT

Dear Educators and Students,

My name is James Graham, and I'm the writer behind plays such as *DEAR ENGLAND* at the National Theatre and West End – about Gareth Southgate's tenure as England Manager, & winner of the Olivier Award for Best Play 2024 – and TV dramas such as *SHERWOOD* for the BBC.

As a playwright I've always been drawn to stories that ask difficult political and social questions, and explore how we can better understand one another, especially when those questions feel urgent for the next generation.

*PUNCH* tells one such story. Based on real events and adapted from Jacob Dunne's book *Right From Wrong*, it centres on a single, impulsive act – a punch thrown on a night out by a young man that led to the death of another. What followed was something extraordinary: a process of Restorative Justice, initiated by the victim's parents, that brought them face to face with the man responsible for their son's death. At its heart, *PUNCH* is about accountability, change, and the human capacity for forgiveness. It invites us to think about how we talk to young people, particularly young men, about violence, responsibility, and what it means to truly make amends.

These questions have felt very present recently, but what sets this story apart – I think – is that it is a uniquely empathetic and hopeful one, with an outcome that demonstrates and celebrates growth in the characters. People at their very best, as well as their worst.

I hope that *PUNCH* will spark conversation in your classrooms as much as it does in the theatre. It's a story that speaks directly to students navigating identity, pressure, and belonging, especially those in Key Stages 4 and 5, and I hope that this education resource pack supports further exploration of these themes.

Warm regards,

James Graham

Photography: XXXXXX XXXXXXXXX

# NOTES FOR EDUCATORS, STUDENTS AND PARENTS

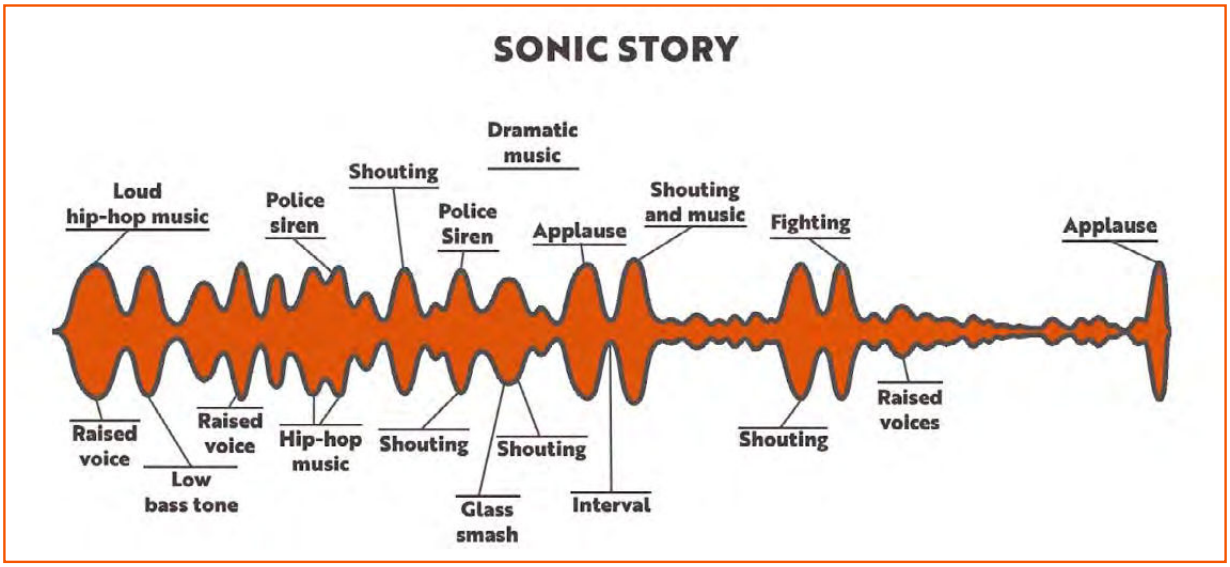
*PUNCH* is a visceral, high impact production which deals with a number of sensitive subjects. The information below is designed to help you prepare your students, and those accompanying them on their theatre visit. Please read this information carefully, and also refer to ***Information for Audiences*** and the *PUNCH* **Audience Guide** where you can find out more about your visit to the theatre, accessibility and self care whilst watching the production.

**CONTENT WARNINGS:**

- Strong language.
- References to violence, death, bereavement, alcohol and substance misuse, and mental health.
- Knives on stage.
- Based on real life people and events.

**PRODUCTION WARNINGS:**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Loud music throughout | Flashing lights throughout | Strobe lighting | Sudden noises | Theatrical smoke and fire/flames effects |



# TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

- Although you may wish to avoid plot spoilers, some students might find it helpful to read reviews or other information about *PUNCH* in order to prepare them for the topics that are covered. Information about Jacob Dunne and his work with Joan Scourfield can be found **here**: Helpful reviews of the production include:
  **Punch review – James Graham's tragic study of a fatal blow | Theatre | The Guardian** ; **Punch, Young Vic, review: another state-of-the-nation masterpiece from James Graham**.

- Although fights and punches are not reenacted naturalistically, the production uses physical theatre to provoke the audience's imaginations whilst depicting the events in the story. Blackouts are used during some moments.

- Strong language is used throughout the production, depicting some of the extreme attitudes and experiences of the characters in the play.

- The play includes reference to alcohol and drug use throughout. Your students may find it helpful to have a facilitated discussion before seeing the play about their attitudes towards the purpose of prison and custodial sentences. (You will also find a section on Predictions and Reflections later in this pack). It is also important that students understand the difference between murder and manslaughter. You can find out more about these issues in ***Learning Guide: PSHE***. You will also find out more about Jacob's prison sentence which was appealed by James Hodgkinson's parents and which may be a source of questions during your debrief from seeing the production.

- The story of *PUNCH* revolves around the consequences of the potential of just one punch to end a victim's life. Using online search engines can prove overwhelming to young people researching the topic, and they may also be exposed to extreme views and unmoderated comments. If you wish to ask students to research the issue of one-punch, you may wish to suggest the following:

  **One Punch UK** is a charity that seeks to raise awareness of one-punch. Humberside Police also have a website dedicated to the topic, **One punch can kill – stop, think, walk away. | Humberside Police**. Information specific to Jacob Dunne and his work on one-punch, restorative justice and the wider criminal justice system can be found in the Further support, research and resources section (page 31 of this guide).

- Both act one and act two can evoke strong emotional, and sometimes audible, reactions from the audience. As part of your trip planning, it is helpful to ensure that students know who and where to go to for support during and after the production. If necessary, please approach Front of House staff for support.

- Students should avoid trying to make notes during the performance. We've included a variety of prompts that you can allocate to different students so that they are actively noticing the production elements. We encourage your students to be fully present and engaged with the action on stage.

The play portrays both real and fictionalised characters. Those who are fictionalised are denoted with a *

- **Joan:** Mother of James Hodgkinson.
- **David:** Father of James Hodgkinson.
- **Jacob:** A young man from Nottingham.
- **Nicola:** Restorative Justice practitioner for Remedi.
- **Wendy:** Jacob's probation officer.
- **Sam:** Jacob's younger brother.
- **Mum:** Mother of Jacob and Sam.
- **Clare*:** A young woman from Nottingham, later Jacob's partner.
- **Raf*:** Jacob's friend from The Meadows estate, who later gives Jacob's name to the police.
- **Raf's Dad*:** Father of Raf.
- **Derek:** Jacob's college lecturer.
- **Sandra:** Facilitator of the Talking Circle that Jacob attends.
- **DC Villiers*:** Detective responsible for investigating the death of James Hodgkinson.

**ONE-PUNCH:**

One-punch is the name for the act and impact of throwing a single, devastating punch. Just one punch can cause serious injury, either from the punch itself or the injuries sustained when a victim falls to the floor, often hitting their head on the ground or other obstacles as they fall. Jacob punched James Hodgkinson once, hitting his jaw, but the impact of James' fall to the ground was found to be the reason for his death. According to a 2024 ITV documentary as part of their Code Blue series, there were a reported 82 deaths attributed to one-punch across the UK over the past five years.

**VIOLENCE:**

In the first act of the play, Jacob and his friends enjoy the thrill of inciting and engaging in violence on their nights out. The violence is often fuelled by drugs and alcohol, as well as gang rivalry. Violence and other social issues are caused, to some extent, by poverty, lack of opportunity and the impact of the physical architecture of The Meadows estate on which Jacob lives as a young man. The estate is built in such a way that it is isolated from the surrounding area, and its layout means that the police are unable to access it when crime does occur. Therefore it becomes a form of playground for those who wish to cause trouble and we see some of the young men taking up the challenge to evade the CCTV cameras.

**"Violence is not the answer. If there's an issue, try and talk through it. We know in our situation, Jacob was in a gang situation, so there were obviously the drink and drugs and lots of other factors but talking is very important."**

**David Hodgkinson**

**CHOICE:**

There are a number of choices that are made during the story, all of which could have had very different outcomes. These include: Jacob's decision to answer his phone when called to Yates' Bar to help his friends; the choice to throw a punch; the choice to participate in the Restorative Justice process; Jacob's choice to re-engage with education and begin a new way of life.

**"You are a reflection of the five people you spend the most time with. You need access to people who are going to influence you positively and have different values to you. It's the same with exploitation and grooming in gangs and young people: they marginalise themselves into subcultures with unhealthy views and activities that get reinforced in order for them to feel like they belong. That erodes those healthy choices."**

**Jacob Dunne**

**HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS:**

Throughout the play, Jacob reflects on the impact of his friendships and relationships which thrived on violence, drug use and the importance of reputation and perceptions of masculinity. At secondary school, Jacob makes his decision about who he will spend his time with, who will influence him and how he will influence others. Later in the play we see Jacob choosing to build much more positive relationships.

**"Young people have got to learn to stick to their guns and not do what's wrong just because sometimes they're pulled in the wrong direction by their peers. They've got to go by what they feel is right, not just join in with everybody else for the sake of it or because of peer pressure."**

**Joan Scourfield**

**COMPASSION:**

Jacob experiences a significant shift in his thinking after he is released from prison. Having only focussed on his own suffering, Jacob develops a much wider sense of the impact his actions have had on other people. Jacob's mum, and Joan, both share the role of a mother and reflect on the suffering of each other as a result of what has happened.

**Mum:** Oh God, that boy… he's someone's boy. Like you're mine; his mother, I keep thinking about what she's going through, losing her son.

**Joan:** I wish I'd said something to her, because even though I was in pain I know that she'd have been carrying her own pain too."

***PUNCH* by James Graham**

**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE:**

The Restorative Justice (RJ) process has been life changing for Jacob, David and Joan.
The fundamental principles of RJ are about being heard, being accountable and finding a way forward through negotiation and mutual respect. It is important to remember that whilst the process seems fast in the structure of the play, in real time the process took over two years between David and Joan first deciding to pursue the process, and meeting Jacob for the first time.

**FORGIVENESS:**

Through the Restorative Justice process, Joan and David reflect on the nature of forgiveness. At the end of the play, Jacob asks them both whether they can consider forgiving him. Whilst Joan says that she thinks she can, David confirms his respect for Jacob but is unable to forgive Jacob for causing the loss of his son, James. The audience is encouraged to consider their own capacity for forgiveness, although the play does not seek to dictate a specific response: there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer to the question of whether we might be able to forgive a perpetrator or someone who has hurt us in some way.

**"Forgiveness is not a wafty thing that you just bestow upon yourself or on other people. It has teeth. It's hard and it comes from running out of any other option: instead of living with this terrible bitterness and anger, it's getting past that to something that heals yourself, other people, and the world."**

**Julie Hesmondhalgh, actor**

**FAMILY:**

James is a much-loved and cherished son to David and Joan. Jacob is the much-loved son in another family, with his brother Sam. The impact of Jacob's actions spreads throughout both families, and the relationships within and between them change and develop. Jacob takes steps to heal the relationship with Sam. Joan and David work with Jacob and have developed a close relationship with him.

**"James was a lovely lad. He had a very caring nature: he mentored young people and volunteered for Childline. He was a family person. James was a trainee paramedic with the London Ambulance Service. He loved skiing, wakeboarding, parachuting - a total adrenaline junkie. He lived life to the fullest."**

**Joan Scourfield and David Hodgkinson**

**"I think for me, when Jan and Nicola (from Remedi) were first coming to us, one of our big things with Jacob was that we didn't want him to go out and do the same thing again. That was one of our big messages. We asked "what's he going to do next?"**

**What was so important for me, when Nicola and Jan came, when we asked the question, they didn't just tell us the answer. They told us what Jacob said, but also that he was upset, and what his emotions were. That means a lot, because you then get a feeling of what sort of person someone is. Nicola actually said, "Oh, he got upset" and "he struggled. It took a little while for him to answer that question". Things like that made a clearer picture of him, because we'd only had that mug shot beforehand and that was quite frightening, really.**

**You're building a picture in your mind, not physically, what the person is going to look like, but what he's going to be like as a person.**

**I THINK THAT GAVE US HOPE, REALLY."**

**Joan Scourfield**

Photography by Marc Brenner

# INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR, ADAM PENFORD

During rehearsals and the preview period of performances, James Graham continued to hone the script to give greater narrative clarity, or to pin down a specific emotional arc of a character, or draw out a theme. He's a genius at recognising where the audience is confused or losing concentration and responding to that.

The conversations with Nicola, who works in Restorative Justice, and Wendy, Jacob's probation officer, were really important. They were able to tell us specific details about the story that we didn't know from Jacob, Joan and David. I think there's something about this play for an audience where you can feel that level of detail. Even though James is so adept at digesting it within the drama, it doesn't feel like you're reading an encyclopaedia, instead it's spoken through the characters' voices in a very naturalistic way. We were so grateful to all those people for giving us their time and their experience. Jacob was around during rehearsals. He acts as an advisor on the production, so the cast had all met him, including David Shields, who plays that character.

It felt important to us that everyone working on the play, on stage and off, had ownership of it. Within Nottingham Playhouse itself, it has been really important for us that everyone working on the play, whether they're in the marketing department or selling tickets or the ushers greeting the audience, understand what the play is about, and why we're doing it.

*PUNCH* is an ensemble piece. Although you have the character of Jacob driving the story, speaking directly to the audience, all the actors are on stage most of the time, playing multiple characters. I always think of act one as about the energy of youth. You've got the character of Jacob

*The cast of PUNCH with director Adam Penford*

charging through the city of Nottingham, partying, doing drugs, drinking, pulling girls, looking for fights and lashing out against the world. There's something about staging act one which needed to feel electric and like you were on a train that was hurtling along. We did that through the amazing movement director Leanne. She was by my side most of the time, and we would work together, and in the more choreographic moment she would lead. An early idea was that the lighting and sound/music would almost feel like you were in a club, in terms of how vibrant it was, like you were at a gig.

Act two is a contrast as the character of Jacob starts to mature emotionally. It has a different tone and the production calms down. This is inherent within the structure of the play.

We knew we didn't want James Hodgkinson, the man who was tragically killed, to appear on stage as that felt disrespectful, but he had to be present. That was incredibly important in telling the story, and to Joan and David, that he wasn't forgotten. James Graham ensured James was

represented through the way he is spoken about by his parents, and there is also a powerful scene that James created where Joan and David are listening to old voicemails from James.

We didn't want to sensationalise or glamorise the violence. We had to carefully consider how we would stage the moment of the punch, particularly because James returns to it several times during the play. I knew from the beginning that we had to do in more of a stylised theatrical way than doing a naturalistic stage fight.

I hoped that people would leave feeling that theatre as a medium for storytelling and for examining the world we live in, is really vital. I think theatre forces you to put yourself in someone else's shoes.

I'm so conscious that with *PUNCH* that you're sat in a big room with lots of other strangers, people you'll never meet again, of all different ethnicities, ages, genders, classes, watching the same story and having a communal experience. Because *PUNCH* is about listening and learning, and thinking about things in a different way, it's the perfect medium to tell that particular story.

I'm always amazed by the meeting scene where Jacob, Joan and David finally meet in person for the first time. Bearing in mind, those actors have actually shared the stage for two and a half hours by that point, but there is something about the moment that Jacob steps into that meeting room and looks Joan and David in the eyes for the first time. The audience hold their breath, and you can always hear a pin drop during that scene. You wouldn't get that watching that on a screen, on your sofa, or even in the cinema: it's because you're watching live actors.

We have worked with the real life people in telling the story, and they are still engaged with it. It was always really important to us that they did give us their blessing.

I always like observing the audience when they realise early in the play that they are actually allowed to laugh, because a lot of people coming into the play who know the context of the story, don't realise it's going to be so funny. That's James' (Graham) gift, because he knows that actually, if you can make the audience laugh, you get them on side.

Photography by Marc Brenner

We wanted to be so respectful in the rehearsal room that I think we were all concerned that if we laughed, was that being disrespectful about the very tragic things we're discussing? But actually when we had a Zoom call with Joan and David early in the rehearsal period, they were having a bit of a laugh and a bit of banter and that relaxed everyone. When you're working on this kind of intense material, you need permission to have fun too.

It's interesting watching an audience react to Jacob. You can sense some people come in having made assumptions about how they are going to feel about that person and it's fascinating observing those assumptions being challenged. That's the power of theatre.

# INTERVIEW WITH PRODUCTION DESIGNER, ANNA FLEISCHLE

**How does your design support the way in which *PUNCH* is told?**

Several key storytelling elements in *Punch* had an immediate impact on the design. When I first began designing the show, I knew that, aside from the actor playing Jacob, the rest of the cast would be multi-roling, requiring rapid costume changes and seamless transitions. This meant the design needed multiple quick-change areas and easy access on and off stage.

Although the show moves through numerous locations I did not want to disrupt the storytelling with traditional scene changes. To maintain the script's fluidity, the design had to allow the action to shift purely through staging - using lighting, reconfiguring space, or adding props like chairs. The space needed to feel energetic, capable of movement and journey, yet also able to hold stillness.

Ultimately, I wanted to create a space that continually pulled the characters back to the centre - looping them through the same cycle again and again. To break free from it would require a fundamental shift in perception - a metaphor for Jacob's economic and social constraints - the systems that hold him in place. But it also reflects the labour, resilience, and deep personal work he had to undertake - with the support of Joan and David - to become who he is today.

The space holds both the weight of entrapment and the fragile, hard-won possibility of escape.

**What research did you do when designing this production?**

I was incredibly fortunate, in researching *Punch*, to work primarily with first-hand material. It's rare to meet the real people behind a story - rarer still to have them walk you through the actual places where it all happened. I spent a day in Nottingham with Jacob, who guided me through the landscapes of his childhood: the streets of The Meadows, the location of the punch, and the path he took during his escape. As we walked, Jacob shared what it felt like to grow up there - how he and his friends navigated the estate's architecture, the sense of both community and invisibility that shaped their world. Walking the streets whilst hearing Jacob speak gave me such a vivid sense of place - of texture, colour, material, and shape- that fed directly into the design.

I knew that the design had to remain flexible but that walk with Jacob offered a clear direction: the set needed to be sculptural - an urban playground. It had to accommodate multiple locations fluidly, but also invite physicality - movement, climbing, running. Something that could be navigated, traversed, and repurposed - encouraging the kind of parkour-like energy that was central to Jacob's story.

**What is in the text that requires specific design choices?**

Close collaboration with Robbie Butler, the Lighting Designer, was essential to achieving the fluidity the story required. Integrating the lighting rig into the physical world of the play became key to maintaining that seamlessness. It also allowed us, particularly in the first half, to portray the accelerating and then escalating thrill of escape - what begins as the high of running free in youth slowly spirals, under the influence of drugs and alcohol, into a chaotic frenzy of partying and prowling the streets.

That rush builds to the moment of the punch after which everything shifts. The second half is stripped back, quieter, and more exposed. The lights that once painted the world of clubs

and nightlife now become spotlights - harsh, watchful, and revealing. The light is now on the weight of consequence and the vulnerability that follows.

**Which key moments in the design are particularly important in conveying story, location and/or mood atmosphere?**

Jacob's first night in prison marks a harsh awakening to the reality of incarceration - separated from the places he knows and the people who love him, he feels lonely and forgotten, "as if the world finally got rid of him." It's Bonfire Night. In the set, he sits behind the handrails of the ramps, peering through them like prison bars. Around him, windows in parts of the city collage light up, and the reflection of fireworks occasionally illuminates the stage and his face. Rather than depicting a literal location, the stage conveys his emotions - isolation and longing.

At one point, Jacob describes how he and his friends mastered moving through their territory without being caught on CCTV. This leads to a dynamic parkour sequence with Jacob and Raf weaving through the set - running up ramps, navigating jump bars and crossing tunnels. Here, the concept of the urban playground truly comes alive, but it also underscores a sobering truth: no matter how exhilarating the journey, they are continually thrown back into the centre - caught in the inescapable circumstances into which they were born.

In the final moments, the same structure that once felt like a confining loop transforms. Through open, flooding light from the sides, the space reveals its openness rather than its enclosure. The surrounding areas no longer overshadow but invite exploration. Now, the space embraces Jacob, the openness around him reflecting the possibilities that the horizon holds.

Photography by Marc Brenner

# INTERVIEW WITH MOVEMENT DIRECTOR, LEANNE PINDER

**What was the process of creating the movement sequences for *PUNCH*?**

The first thing I always do is read the script to get first impressions and understand the story. On reading this incredible James Graham script, you can just see, it is so brilliantly written, in a way that suggests where movement should be or could be. It's super clear where the speed and pace of the scenes and action could benefit from movement or small sections of choreography. On reading any script I try to imagine the scene and come up with initial ideas ready to pitch or put forward to the team. I met with the director, Adam, early on to discuss where he/we thought movement should be, then out of our discussions, I had a very clear first idea of how much was needed or what we would try. I then took those sections, researched all I could about the play, time, setting and people and came up with multiple plans/ideas or starting points for each section. Very early on I knew I wanted to have a "parkour" type feel to a couple of sections.

Seeing designs of the set can be very helpful and the concrete of the setting, bridge, bike bars and the speed of the action, running away, police chases etc, really felt like this kind of movement language would be great. I then started researching this kind of style, watching footage and workshopping with some young dancers/ students I know and work with. Sometimes early on it is helpful to use confident physical beings to play and try ideas to see if it feels like a successful way to go. It helped me understand that it would be an interesting physical language to use. Every idea was then workshopped in the room using the actors we have to see what we could achieve. I always turn up having a few different ideas and alternatives to see what suits the piece and the people and so I can try something different if the first idea isn't working for some reason. Its also helpful to use the actors to see what they bring and be able to pivot from there using their abilities and energies.

**Please tell us about three key moments where movement is particularly important in the telling of the piece.**

The first pub crawl and night out are written with a very fast pace, particularly the pub-crawl sequence. It moves through the night very quickly, it's almost filmic. I wanted to honour this pace and show the passing of time as the night goes on, using a more heightened physical language. It allows us to do this quickly. We use a physicality we called 'shoaling' to move around each other quickly, changing places as we travel across the space, changing the dynamic and pace as the night goes on. We see the characters visit a few places in a very short time. Each picture is changed as they 'shoal' to represent the crawl from one place to the next. Not only that, the way you have to shift your body at speed to move through the group allows us to see the visceral energy of the nights out, the camaraderie, the sense of belonging and why this became an attractive way of living.

The New Years Eve pub crawl. Although with similar reasons to the first this pub crawl, the second, on New Year's Eve is different. We see Jacob leave prison, having not changed at all and heading straight out on a night out. He's fallen straight back into old habits and old ways, but by the end of the night we use the movement to show him overwhelmed by the loud music, by the amount of people, by the ingestion of substances. He isn't used to it anymore. He has been incarcerated for a while. He is showing signs of overwhelm due to the lights, the loud music and talking, being around people. It is a complete contrast to the first pub crawl and shows us that there is starting to be some form of change to come from within the piece.

Repeating movement with different dynamics and intentions is helpful to show the change, warping sense of time and space, showing the effects of alcohol and substances on the body as the movement floats or squeezes.

There is a whole movement section in the first half of the play to describe what Jacob's life was like in Nottingham: the raving, the lashing out, the drugs, the partying, pulling, blacking out. It is so integral in understanding why this might have been a loop that young men in Nottingham at the time got caught up in - it was a way of life.
A night out was a release from a somewhat unsupported real life. The movement is helpful to us to show what they felt, why they did it, how it could easily become an addiction to feel wanted, needed, and high.

**What was your thought process on how to stage/suggest the violence that is in the story? What advice can you give to young theatre makers about how to create scenes of tension/ aggression/conflict in a safe and sensitive way, and in a way that is more nuanced and creative than simply relying on 'realistic' fighting?**

From conversations early on, we always knew we never wanted to see out-and-out violence or 'realistic' violence in the show. As it is written and true to life, there was never any martial arts training or boxing coaching. No one had any skills taught to them in this area. It felt more respectful to the people affected by this story to find a different way to tell this, but also to allow the audience to find imagination within the piece too.

I'm a huge fan of taking real movement and exploding it to theatricalise it, by using slow motion, with the help of lighting and sound to support these ideas, building the pace up to slow something down or pausing completely builds a state of tension that the audience can really lean into.

Using a blackout at the highest point of tension is also very effective, allowing the audience to think for themselves. Marrying movement with a build up of sound, sound effects and pace of music can add a huge amount of drama.
It is about breaking down the 'fight' or specific violent moment, working out what it is that you want to say, what is important in the action and trying various ways of doing this.
Which part is interesting to slow down or speed up and why? Can it be supported by sound? Is using the breath helpful?

A good example of this is in the riots. We see a 'Molotov Cocktail' lit and using exaggerated slow motion movement, into a moment of acceleration we are able to make it look like this bottle is thrown through the Bridewell Custody suites.
The incredible lighting supports the smash through the window and we can instantly understand what has happened without actually having to hurl a bottle anywhere.

**Movement directing isn't always about big sequences: what other moments in the play required your input which may not have been immediately obvious?**

Transitions and scene changes. What you might not know is that every scene change and transition in the show is completely choreographed: which way people come in and sit down, how they turn out of their chairs, which shoulder to turn from has been carefully crafted. This is so we are always finding the right pace and flow within the show and the focus is always in the right place. You may notice that the action is more frantic in the first half, and calm and more thoughtful in the second. It is representative of the character of Jacob and his growth, both in years and as a person. His mind and body language calms as he gets older and learns coping techniques until for example he is able to speak in front of an audience at a TED Talk.

The flow of the show is also representative of a circle, referencing the 'Talking Circle' that Jacob is in the middle of, and energy flows this way around the space. Energy coming in pushes other scenes out and always has a nod to this important element of the story.

**How did you encourage the actors to portray the characters through movement. What exploration did you do, for example, about characterisation and relationships between people?**

Watching footage. Researching the real person and their posture, gestures and mannerisms.

This is a true story so there are many examples and it is helpful to watch some footage of the interviews to understand the body language and what was happening at the time. If it was wanted, the actors could choose to take some of these mannerisms on, or use them as a base to form character or understand them. I found that I only had to encourage small moments, leaning further in each direction of each character.

Because the actors multirole, it is excellent to see a clear physical distinction between each character. All the actors needed was confirmation of what was clear to an audience and where we could push further to separate each character from the next.

Another small example is asking the whole cast to form the gang members. In these gang scenes, my approach was about encouraging the actors to go with the essence of the characters rather than pretending to be that age. Using the intention of the character, for example: finding the idea of how great it feels to be in the clothes, purchased specifically for that night out, finding the ego, when you feel that sense of belonging to this gang - working from feeling rather than aesthetic.

Photography by Marc Brenner

# INTERVIEW WITH SOUND DESIGNER AND COMPOSER, ALEXANDRA FAYE BRAITHWAITE

**There are a lot of sound effects in the play, some of which (such as the bird song) might be quite surprising. How does sound help tell the story of *PUNCH*?**

Sound helps the story of *PUNCH* by aiming to set the scene of where the characters are. Musically, I try to write the emotion of the piece, and the sound tells the story of place and time. Are we indoors or outdoors? Are we at school or are we in prison? It helps with the storytelling.

**Which are the moments when sound is particularly important in creating the mood, atmosphere and/or narrative of the play.**

I would say that the first ten minutes of the show, where Jacob is introducing us to his world and his life and friends are very important. To write the music and the world for that Adam, our director, recorded himself saying all the lines for me up until the phone call to Jacob. I used it to aurally sketch the tone of what the character was speaking about and the worlds that he found themselves in in that moment. I think it helps the audience to jump in with us.

Another key moment for me would be the moment before Jacob meets James' parents. Here I use parts of the themes (within the music) that we heard throughout the show to tonally set the mood and to heighten the tension in the audience. It was important for me that we had heard those themes before, so as an audience we could sit and reflect on all of the events in time that led up to this meeting.

The last ten minutes of the show is all scored with piano. James asked me on Press Night in Nottingham whether it was possible to do this and I stayed up all night writing it! I think it drives us to the end and creates a series of moving moments.

**Leanne speaks in her interview about how inspiring your work was to her creative process, particularly in considering the music/sound of the time in which the play is set.**
**What music did you use/compose which spoke to that particular time period?**

Before writing the music for the show, I listened to a lot of music that Jacob listened to at the time. He sent me a playlist, which was essentially a lot of Dizzee Rascal songs. I used these as inspiration to write the score for the show.

Photography by Marc Brenner

# INTERVIEW WITH LIGHTING DESIGNER, ROBBIE BUTLER

**How does your lighting design support the way in which *PUNCH* is told?**

As with any play, the lighting hugely influences the story being told: it tells us as an audience where to look, where we are, and even how to feel! The lighting for *PUNCH* follows the movement and sound design throughout; Act one follows Jacob as he moves through his adolescence and the play captures the freneticism of those years, so the energy of the lighting matches that chaos and intensity. Then for act two when the pace begins to settle and the very serious drama unfolds, the lighting slows down too and allows us to fully focus on what's being said on stage.

**Please tell us about two or three key moments in the piece in which lighting design is particularly important in conveying story, location and/or mood atmosphere.**

We have a series of points where we use lighting to try and give a sense of place - anytime that we are in Nottingham or The Meadows we try and draw attention to the urban surrounds of the set design. When we are in other places such as the school, the police station, or the hospital we don't light those features as this helps to draw us into the interior setting of these scenes. We also try to evoke ideas for other areas, so for example in the TV studio we use a little red light as an "on air" sign, we have a flashing light as an alarm in the riots, and our police station lights are split into sections similar to a fluorescent ceiling unit.

We also try to use different parts of the rig for different themes, for example the circle of lights overhead tend to be used at times when Jacob is experiencing support.

Photography by Marc Brenner

**Can you describe some of the technology used in the design for the play?**

*PUNCH* uses a mix of old-school lighting instruments and effects coupled with some of the latest technology on the market. For example, the overhead beam lights are tungsten Svoboda battens - they've been around since 1968! Our follow spot system is probably the most advanced element of the production; we have a moving head fixture (a light which moves) rigged front of house in the auditorium which has a camera mounted to it. This is then fed back to a remote which can control the fixture. It's operated live by the follow spot operator every show!

# INFORMATION TO HELP YOU WRITE ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

**BEFORE THE VISIT: PREDICTIONS AND REFLECTIONS**

When you evaluate a piece of theatre, it is important to consider your expectations and whether they were met or exceeded. Your teacher may ask you to discuss your ideas, or to make notes below.

Before you go see the production, make some brief notes in answer to the following prompts:

- The play takes place in a variety of different locations in Nottingham, including night clubs, The Meadows estate, a prison canteen, a chapel, a street, the inside of different houses, and a hospital. How do you think the set design will help create this range of settings for an audience? You may wish to create a sketch of your ideas.

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- There are six actors in the production, but a large number of characters including Jacob, the parents of James Hodginkson, and the people around Jacob before and after he serves his prison sentence. This means that the majority of the cast play multiple roles. How do you think they will make each character distinct? What challenges do you think there will be for the actors in playing so many different roles?

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- The soundtrack to the play includes original music and popular music that many members of the audience will recognise from the era in which the play is set. What can you find out about music that was popular in 2011?

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- The summer of 2011 saw riots across the country. What do you know about those riots and why do you think they are mentioned in a play which is about a specific event that took place in Nottingham that summer?

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- One of the main themes of the play is the effect of the criminal justice system on both perpetrators and victims of crime. Take a moment to consider your current opinions on: i) The purpose of prison sentences ii) Society's attitudes to people who have a criminal record iii) How we can prevent

crime and violence, particularly crimes committed by people between the ages of 18 and 25. How can we deter crime, and rehabilitate offenders so that they do not reoffend?

**Further information on the criminal justice system and Restorative Justice (RJ) can be found in our PSHE Learning Guide.**

- *PUNCH* is based on real events that took place in 2011. Many of the characters in the play are real people, and others represent a combination of other people who were involved in some way. What do you think the ethical considerations of creating a play based on a real story might be?

## WATCHING THE PRODUCTION

Your teacher may allocate specific aspects of the production to each person in your class, or you can use the prompts below to help you reflect on what you've seen. We recommend that you avoid writing notes during the performance itself - use your time in the interval and after the production to update your notes.

## PERFORMANCE

- The play opens with a direct address monologue delivered by the character of Jacob. How does the actor immediately create a presence on stage, and sustain the audience's attention? Think about the use of voice, physicality and facial expression.
- There are a number of physical sequences which help move the narrative forward. This includes a theme park, playing on fruit machines in pubs, and dancing in nightclubs. How can you describe the movement that the ensemble creates?
- Act one is very fast-paced and movement across the stage includes moments of parkour, ensemble movement and physicality. The second act contrasts with this - the pace changes as the audience learns more about life after Jacob's prison sentence. How is this change in pace created on stage by the six actors?
- How do the actors use the space to help create the different locations? How does their physical movement, posture, gait and use of space affect the audience's responses?
- Five of the six actors multi-role, and the actor playing Jacob plays him at different ages, including as a child in the final year of primary school. How do the actors ensure their various different characters are clearly defined from each other? How do they use costume to help with this?
- The play is non-naturalistic. What techniques has the director employed which makes this play non-naturalistic? Why do you think the creative team has chosen this style for the play?

- Audiences are often surprised at how much humour there is in the play. Scenes such as the meeting between Jacob, David and Joan, and Jacob's reunion with his brother include moments of humour which require strong comic timing. Why is this necessary in such a serious play? What skills do the actors need to ensure that these moments are effective?

**LIGHTING**

- The production uses a range of lighting effects. As well as follow spots, there are a number of focussed spotlights which isolate Jacob during particular moments. What impact does that have on your reaction to Jacob and his character?
- The non-naturalistic set needs to represent a variety of different locations. How does lighting assist with this? Think particularly about the talking circle and the scenes set in a prison, a church, and a chapel.
- Some of the sequences involve moving lights and chase sequences. In which scenes are these used and what are the effects? Consider mood, atmosphere, setting and pace.
- Colour is used to create the nightclub settings. What colours do you notice? How do these contrast to the scenes which are more dialogue-based?

**MUSIC AND SOUND**

- Notice the sound during the pre-show state - whilst the audience is coming into the auditorium before the performance starts. What do you notice? What specific sounds do you hear?
- Some of the music has been specifically composed for this production. It reflects the popular music of the time (late noughties, early 2010s), particularly club and dance music which has a pulsating, rapid beat. How does this also help build the tension of the piece?
- There are also recognisable pieces of music which are mixed into the soundtrack. This includes Elgar's 'Nimrod' (from the Enigma Variations), music by Basement Jaxx and Franz Biebl's 'Ave Maria.'
- Much of the production has underscoring and recorded sound effects such as birdsong. However, there are other moments where there is silence, or when there is a single person speaking. This contrast helps to heighten the audience's emotional responses. Which are the moments of silence that you found particularly moving?
- All of the actors use radio mics during the performance and the sound is mixed live. Why do you think this decision was taken for *PUNCH*?
- What recorded sound effects do you notice and how do they create setting, as well as mood and atmosphere?
- Which moments in the play demonstrated the integration of lighting and sound to create specific effects for the audience?

## SET

- The main structure of the set is inspired and informed by The Meadows housing estate. Jacob took the designer, Anna Fleischle, on a tour of the estate. The tunnel that you see upstage centre of the set is based on a real tunnel on the estate. How does the set design help reflect the realities and challenges of The Meadows that are discussed in the play?
- Where are the exit and entrance points on the set? Why do you think those decisions have been made?
- What do you notice about the floor design of the stage? How does this contribute towards creating a setting for the play and communicating the wider social issues surrounding estates like The Meadows?

## COSTUME

- Jacob begins the play in a long-sleeved white shirt, and dark jeans with black Fred Perry trainers. How does his costume change as the play progresses, and how does it help communicate his different emotional states? How do those changes also demonstrate the way in which his attitude changes throughout the play?
- The other five actors use minimal changes in costume to help identify their different characters. This is often achieved with a base costume of dark top and dark trousers, with different coloured/styles of jumper, cardigan or other top layer. Choose one or two actors and track how they change their costumes throughout the performance.
- How is colour used in the costumes to suggest age, social status and mood or state of mind?

Photography by Marc Brenner

**KEY WORDS:**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Non-naturalistic | Direct address | Pace | Movement |
| Episodic | Multi-role | Tension | Static set |
| Monologue | State of the nation | Physical theatre | Setting |

You might also find the following explanations helpful, so that you can describe the characters as clearly as possible

- **Perpetrator:** The person who commits a criminal or harmful act.
- **Victim:** The person who suffers as a result of a crime.
- **Facilitator:** Someone who supports and guides a conversation, workshop, or other group discussion for a specific purpose.

**WRITING ABOUT PERFORMANCE? YOU COULD FOCUS ON:**

- Jacob's opening monologue.
- The scene in which Jacob joins his friends at Yates' Wine Lodge shortly before the punch.
- Jacob's first meeting with David, Joan and Nicola.
- The scene between Jacob and his mum as she mentions her compassion for Joan and David.
- The scenes between David and Joan following James' injury and his final days in hospital.
- The scene between Jacob and Sam after the death of their mum.
- The final moments of the play and how they link back to the beginning of the play.

**WRITING ABOUT SET DESIGN? CONSIDER:**

- The creation of a clear space in the central part of the stage to allow the use of physical theatre.
- The use of a semi-circular ramp, with railings, which create locations on The Meadows estate, the bridge where Jacob has been fishing, stairs within a house, and the representation of blocks of flats and people looking down from balconies.
- The motifs of circles, including the use of a circle embedded in the floor, which can be lit from the floor itself. Link this to the talking circle in which we see Jacob early on in the play.

- The way in which the different levels of the set also create shadow which helps suggest some of the architectural and social problems within the estate where Jacob lives. You might also discuss the creation of exits and entrances here.
- The use of colour in the set to create mood and atmosphere.

**WRITING ABOUT MUSIC AND SOUND? HELPFUL EXAMPLES INCLUDE:**

- The use of recorded birdsong in the pre-show state.
- Recognisable chart music by bands such as Basement Jaxx, to create a sense of time (2011) and music with a high number of beats per minute (BPM) to create pace and anticipation.
- Recorded sound effects which include sirens, crowds singing and chanting, and the crackle of the phoneline when David and Joan speak on the telephone following the assault.
- Contrasting moments of high-volume surround sound contrasting with sudden moments of complete silence.

**FOCUSSING ON LIGHTING? YOU COULD TALK ABOUT:**

- The use of harsh, white lighting in the early moments of the play which might make the audience feel uncomfortable or unusually alert.
- The use of pink and purple lighting during the club scenes.
- Chase sequences which mimic search lights or sirens. You might also discuss strobe lighting here.
- The use of focussed spotlights to highlight emotional moments such as the phone calls between David and Joan when James is in hospital.
- The use of blackouts to encourage the audience to use their own imagination at crucial moments in the narrative, including the moment that Jacob throws the punch.
- The use of lighting to create the windows of various streets during moments where Jacob travels through Nottingham on foot or in a vehicle.

Photography by Marc Brenner

**ANALYSING COSTUME? YOU COULD DESCRIBE:**

- The use of Jacob's costume to show his different ages and attitudes during the narrative. He begins in a sharp white shirt and dark jeans. At other times he wears various different T-shirts including a dark, collared T-shirt. In prison he wears grey tracksuit bottoms with a jumper, or a grey T-shirt.
- The use of character signifiers such as Wendy's baggy orange jumper, Joan's dressing gown, David's chunky-knit collared jumper and Clare's hospital scrubs.
- The non-naturalistic technique of the audience often seeing the change in costumes, signalling to the audience that an actor is multi-roling. The costumes also need to be easy to take on and off because of the speed at which costume changes take place.
- The use of colour and shape to signify a character's age and state of mind. Jacob's mum's costumes provide a good example, as she declines her clothes seem too big for her and her cardigan is a muted shade of purple.

Photography by Marc Brenner

## ANALYSING AND EVALUATING THE PLAY

If you are writing about the production for an exam, it is important that you can evaluate what you have seen. This means that you should be able to articulate the following:

- **What the performance made you think and feel.** For example, what emotions did you experience as the play progressed? What did you learn about the themes and issues that *PUNCH* tackles?
- **Which moments engaged and sustained your attention?** How were those moments created in order to be successful?
- **Did the way in which the play ends surprise you?** There is a slight change in performance style in the final five minutes of the play. How did you respond to that?
- **Were there any moments in particular that have stayed with you?** *PUNCH* is a powerful and emotive piece of theatre. Have you been surprised with your reaction to seeing the play?
- **How would you describe the play to someone who hasn't seen it?** If you are writing for an examiner, they may not have seen the play. Therefore it is important that you can describe what you saw on stage, and use technical terms to describe it accurately and concisely. We have included some key terms in this section of the guide to help you do so.
- **Has your attitude towards the themes of the play changed in any way?** If so, can you identify what these changes are and how the production has achieved that?

## DISCUSSION POINTS AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Teachers can use this guide to explain some questions that may be raised during conversations about the production.

### WHY DID JACOB GET SUCH A SHORT SENTENCE?

It is important to remember that the sentencing process is not a reflection on the worth of someone's life. Judges must abide by a series of guidelines and laws which dictate how long a sentence is, and how much of that sentence will be served in prison. Whilst the maximum prison term for manslaughter is life imprisonment, there are a variety of factors which contribute to sentencing decisions.

Jacob's sentence was for manslaughter rather than murder. The sentence was for 30 months, and was shortened because of his age (under 21 at the time of the offence) and his guilty plea. One of the factors is the perceived danger of an offender being released into the community, as well as previous convictions or good character, and whether death was the intended outcome of an action. People can be recalled to prison if they re-offend or do not meet their probation conditions. You can find out more about sentencing guidelines in **this information** from the Metropolitan Police.

Joan and David did appeal the length of the sentence but it was upheld because it met the guidelines for sentencing.

### HOW DID THE MESSAGES MOVE BETWEEN JACOB, DAVID AND JOAN BEFORE THEY MET?

The communication between them was achieved through the Restorative Justice process. Nicola and other facilitators from Remedi would visit David and Joan, and then relay the meeting and questions to Jacob. Facilitators would not only relay the content of the conversations, but also make observations about how Jacob engaged in conversations. In the play, for example, Nicola tells David and Joan that Jacob can find it difficult to make eye contact during difficult conversations. Observations like this helped lay the foundations for their first meeting in which everyone felt safe, able to communicate and be heard.

You can listen to Joan talking about the process here, on an episode of the F Word podcast by the Forgiveness Project here:

**Joan Scourfield on facing the man who killed her son - The Forgiveness Project**.

### IT IS MORALLY COMPLEX THAT JACOB'S STORY IS MADE INTO A PLAY WHICH GETS A LOT OF PUBLICITY?

*PUNCH* is a play with an important message and whilst it is based on a specific case, *PUNCH* has a much wider impact in the awareness of Restorative Justice, the criminal justice and the issues facing young people in society in the 21st century. Since the play's premiere at Nottingham Playhouse in 2024, it has always been produced in such a way as to ensure that it opens up conversations and learning. This has included workshops for young people, special projects within communities - including in The Meadows in Nottingham and within a Young Offenders Institute when the play was at the Young Vic in London - and free post show talks with experts working in different areas of social justice. This culture of care and learning extended into the West End run of the play, which led to the creation of this learning pack, a post-show talk series, 'After the Punch', curated by The Forgiveness Project, and 3 special performances for young people and community groups with Go Live Theatre. In addition the West End producers and James Graham have committed their earnings from the West End run will be channelled into sharing the play and its learning with young people in the future. In this way everyone involved in Punch hopes that the real life tragedy at its heart can be a source of valuable learning for everyone who encounters the play.

## SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE & THEIR CAREGIVERS

- Just For Kids Law advocates for young people to ensure that their rights are respected and their voices are heard.
- The Mix is an organisation which supports young people with support and information including issues such as relationships, drugs and alcohol, education and mental health.
- For young people living with a parent who is dependent on drugs and/or alcohol, The Children's Society provides a list of sources of support.
- Barnardo's provides support for young people who have a parent or relative in prison.
- The Runaway Helpline can help young people who are thinking of running away, who have already run away or who are away from home because of gang involvement. They have a comprehensive range of resources to help, as well as having a confidential helpline.

## DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

- Frank is an organisation which provides information about drugs and can be contacted by phone, via online chat, text or email. Frank can also signpost to sources of support in your local area.
- Alcoholics Anonymous supports people in their recovery and sobriety.
- Narcotics Anonymous is a group in which its members help each other to become and stay drug free.
- For those affected by a loved one's use of substances, and those bereaved as a result of drug use, Addiction Family Support can provide help and guidance.

## MENTAL HEALTH

- Young Minds fights for a world where no young person feels alone with their mental health. Use this link to find help and information for dealing with emotions and supporting positive mental health.
- With You is a mental health, drug and alcohol charity. Their website hosts a wide range of information as well as signposting local services.

## LAW, RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND VICTIM SUPPORT

- **Victim Support** is an organisation which supports people who have been the victims of crime. Their website provides information and guidance about their services. The **website** also has a 'leave this website' feature which redirects to the Google homepage should users be concerned that someone else may see them looking at the website.

- **PACT** is an organisation which works with prisoners, people with convictions, and their families, throughout the justice process. This includes court proceedings, imprisonment, and the subsequent release and reintegration into the community.

- **The Longford Trust** provides scholarships to serving and former prisoners to study at university and provides mentoring and employability support.

- **Oasis Restore** is a youth justice organisation which focuses on restoration and therapeutic approaches to improve the life chances of young people in custody.

- **The Common Ground Justice Project** is creating space for a new kind of conversation on crime and justice. By listening to voters, victims and communities, the project bridges divides and invites people from all walks of life to help shape a safer, fairer Britain.

- **Calm Mediation** is a London-based organisation which provides mediation services in a variety of settings including the education system, residential neighbourhoods and for families.

- **The Forgiveness Project** collects and shares stories from victims or survivors of crime, and those of perpetrators, focusing on how they have rebuilt their lives after experiencing hurt and trauma.

- **Why Me?** is a national charity which delivers Restorative Justice.

- Remedi, the organisation involved in the Restorative Justice for Joan, David and Jacob can be found at their **website.** You can also email queries to them at **rj@remediuk.org**.

- The **Restorative Justice Council** is the independent membership organisation for Restorative Justice.

- **Appeal** is a charity and a law practice that fights miscarriages of justice.

- **Catch 22** works with both young people and adults providing intervention, rehabilitation and victim services in prison and in the community.

## POSITIVE INITIATIVES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- **Support Through Sport** use sport to engage young people, empowering them to develop positive lifestyles and avoid influences which will be detrimental to their wellbeing.

- **Growing Against Violence** work to safeguard young people and prevent youth violence.

- **Football Beyond Borders** is an education and inclusion charity which uses the power of football to change the lives of young people.

## DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SOCIAL CARE

- Refuge provide help and support for women and children experiencing domestic abuse.
- Change Grow Live supports a range of different issues including justice, physical and mental health, and substance use.
- St Giles Trust is a charity which helps people who have been held back by abuse, the criminal justice system, homelessness and poverty.

## ORGAN DONATION

- Full information about NHS Organ Donation can be found on this website. You can find out about the law surrounding donation, and how to opt out of the scheme, as well as information and guidance regarding faith and funeral arrangements. It also provides information about blood donation and how to be a living donor for donations such as tissue, bone marrow and platelets.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- Jacob's TED Talk which is referenced in the play can be found here: Transformative Justice | Jacob Dunne | TEDxYouth@Bath.
- A Guardian article about Joan and Jacob's relationship can be found here: My son's killer and me: grief, pain and the power of forgiveness after a one-punch death | Theatre | The Guardian.
- A Guardian article about Jacob's book, Right From Wrong can be found here: The man who killed a stranger with a single punch, and then turned his life around | Youth justice | The Guardian.

Photography by Marc Brenner