



Testing the ECHO

by David Edgar

Education Resource Pack

by Rebecca Pilbeam, Out of Joint Education
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All rehearsal photography by Jon Bradfield.

1. Introduction for Teachers

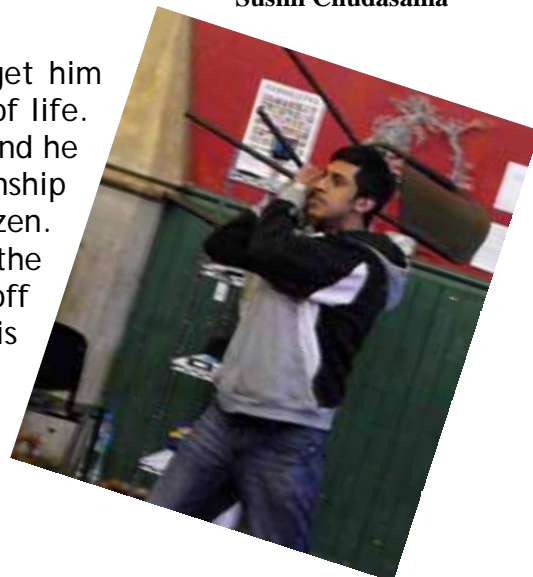
The resource materials in this pack are intended to enhance your students' enjoyment and understanding of *Testing the Echo*. The activities present creative, practical strategies for learning in a classroom setting. The resources are primarily aimed at students aged 16+ who are studying Drama or English at BTEC or A Level, as well as Citizenship. The activities can be adapted to suit younger pupils and older students, as well as other subject areas.

2. Synopsis: the stories of *Testing the Echo*

MAHMOOD'S STORY - West Yorkshire

Mahmood is kidnapped by Jamal who wants to get him off drugs and bring him back to the Islamic way of life. Mahmood's girlfriend, Bernie, arrives to see him and he tells her he is studying to gain his British citizenship because his dad thinks he is already a British citizen. Jamal is sceptical but helps Mahmood revise for the test. Mahmood manages both to get himself off drugs and to pass his Citizenship test, refinding his religious belief along the way.

'Mahmood'
Sushil Chudasama



EMMA'S STORY - London

Emma is an ESOL teacher at a college in London. At the beginning of the play we see her trying to teach the Citizenship curriculum to her class of students from all over the world. One of Emma's Muslim students, Nasim, starts to be disruptive in class: when Emma gives the class a handout with pictures to take home, Nasim says she is unable to take the images into her house. She then walks out of a class when asked to discuss an image showing an English breakfast because it contains pork.



'Emma' Teresa Banham

We also see Emma giving a dinner party at her home for her sister Pauline, and Pauline's boyfriend Ian, and Emma's work colleague, Martin. The four discuss the way society is divided into "tribes" and they hit upon the thorny issue of what happens when the values of different "tribes" collide.

At college, Nasim files a complaint against Emma whose belief in both her teaching and her ideas about her own identity are tested by Nasim's attack.

CHONG'S STORY - New Maldon

Chong is Korean by birth and works for an unidentified company in London. He is studying to take the Life in the UK test and is trying to revise during his breaks in the workplace canteen. His workmates, Derek and Chloe mock the practice questions and subvert the test. Joshua decides to help Chong revise. Derek, Chloe and Joshua are surprised by the view of Britishness the test presents. They celebrate when Chong passes his test at the end of the play.



'Chong' Ian Dunn

TETYANA'S STORY - Birmingham

Tetyana is Ukrainian by birth but she is now married to Aziz, a Pakistani man, and living in Birmingham with Aziz and his 11 year old daughter, Muna. She is studying to take the Life in the UK test so that she can become a British citizen and divorce her husband and stay in the UK. Muna at first unwittingly helps Tetyana but becomes increasingly suspicious and when she realises what Tetyana is actually doing tries to sabotage her revision by deliberately giving her the wrong answers. Tetyana in her turn realises what Muna is up to and the two reach an agreement that Muna will help



Tetyana if Tetyana agrees never to abandon Muna. There is a hitch when Tetyana realises that the test centre is next to Aziz's big supplier. Muna helps Tetyana disguise herself in her mother's Niqab. With Muna's help Tetyana passes the test but during her ceremony Aziz bursts in to stop Tetyana swearing her oath and becoming British. Mahmood holds Aziz back so Tetyana can complete the ceremony at which point Aziz admits that he lied and that Tetyana will not be sent home if she leaves Aziz; he lied because he and Muna need Tetyana.

'Tetyana' Kirsty Bushell

3. Becoming British

- **Who has the right to become a British citizen?**

To be eligible to apply for British citizenship you must be over 18, of sound mind and of good character, have been resident in the UK for 5 years (3 years if you are married to a British citizen) and intend to make your home in the United Kingdom. You must also have sufficient knowledge of English (or Welsh or Scottish Gaelic) and of life in the UK.

- **How do you become a British citizen?**

You must fulfil all the requirements listed above and since 2005 all applicants now have to prove they have sufficient knowledge of English and of life in the UK. The application process provides two routes to gaining British citizenship:

1) **Life in the UK Test**

- Studying and taking the test is designed to give applicants the practical knowledge they need to live and work in the UK and be an active member of society. You need to be competent in English to take the test.
- To pass the test applicants must learn the information contained in chapters 2 - 6 of *Life in the United Kingdom: A Journey to Citizenship*. The books cost £9.99.
- Applicants take the test on a computer at an official test centre. There are 20 questions and the test can take up to 45 minutes; the pass mark is 75%. You can take the test as many times as you like, but it costs £34 each time.

2) **ESOL course with Citizenship content**

- ESOL means English for Speakers of Other Languages. To qualify for naturalization the English course must contain teaching on the practical meaning of citizenship. The intentions of these classes are twofold:
 1. To give students sufficient knowledge of life in the UK.
 2. To develop students' knowledge of the English language.
- A folder of materials has been compiled by the Department for Education and Skills in collaboration with various educational organisations. Teachers are expected to pick and mix from the 12 topics which cover ideas of citizenship, politics, society, human rights, work and public services.
- If your level of English is below ESOL level 3 then you must take the classes rather than the test and then must demonstrate that you have progressed one level, so you do not need to reach level 3. This is to demonstrate a commitment to improve your competence in English.

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The contents page from *Life in the UK: A Journey to Citizenship 2nd Edition* (2007). Published by TSO (The Stationery Office).

- On average, students are expected to have between 200 and 450 hours of tuition for each ESOL level. The fee contribution for a minimum length course of 6 hours a week will be around £426 and a full-time course of 450 hours will be around £990.¹ Refugees and those legally resident in the UK for 3 years *may* qualify for free tuition.

- **The Citizenship Ceremony**

The Citizenship Ceremony is the final requirement in the naturalization process and all those granted British Citizenship have to take part in a ceremony within 90 days of their official notification. The ceremony is meant to be a meaningful way of celebrating your citizenship as well as an opportunity to be welcomed into the local community and to meet others in your area. It is usually a group ceremony and includes speeches by local dignitaries encouraging new citizens to play an active role in their community.

During the ceremony all new citizens have to swear their allegiance to the Queen, either by oath, which means swearing by God, or by allegiance. They then receive a certificate, a welcome pack and a commemorative gift. Finally, everyone stands to sing the national anthem.

For more information on the test and the ESOL classes visit:

www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/applying/nationality/knowledgeoflifeintheuk

For details of the test visit: www.lifeintheuktest.gov.uk.

...or for the ESOL Materials: www.niace.org.uk/Projects/esolcitizenship

¹ According to a survey by the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages, 2007.

Stereotypes

1.4

Task sheet 1

People who don't live in the UK sometimes have ideas about life in the UK.

For example:

1. "People in the UK like to form orderly queues and wait patiently for their turn, for example when waiting for a bus."



2. "A handshake is a common form of greeting among the people here."



3. "People are very polite, and say 'please' and 'thank you' a lot."



4. "People pay for drinks in pubs and bars at the time they order them."



5. "People don't like it if you ask personal or intimate questions."



6. "People drink lots of tea and the national dish is fish and chips."

Maybe these things are true, maybe they are not.

Think about your experience of life in the UK.

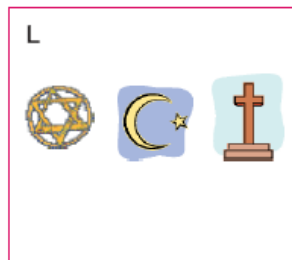
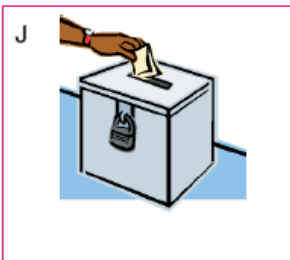
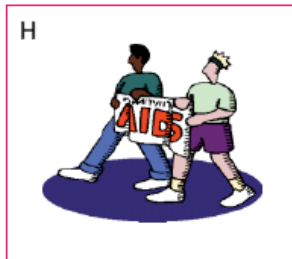
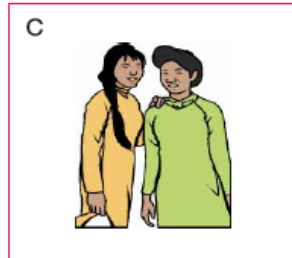
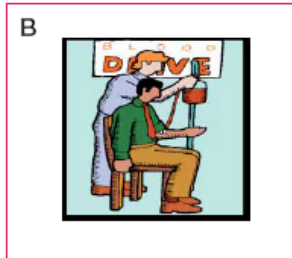
Look at the above statements and talk about whether they are true or not, for example:

- I think it's true.
- I think it's partly true.
- I don't think it's true.
- I don't know, I haven't enough experience of it.

Exploring beliefs, values and opinions

1.5

LEARNERS' ACTIVITY



4. Britishness & Citizenship - what does it all mean?

In April 2006, Out of Joint along with David Edgar held a week's workshop with ten actors. At this point David had an idea for a play but wanted to use the actors as a resource for conducting research. A large part of the week involved interviewing people who were connected in some way with issues of citizenship and integration, including Sir Bernard Crick, who wrote the first edition of *Life in the UK*, on which the citizenship tests are based, Trevor Phillips, the Head of the Commission for Racial Equality and Salma Yaqoob, a Birmingham City Councillor and Vice-Chair of the Stop the War Coalition. Here are some of the views on Britishness and citizenship that we came across during this research period.

"Recent debates on integration and identity have problematised Muslim dress, lifestyle, culture, organisations and our place in society itself. This has led to Muslims feeling beleaguered, misunderstood and weary of constantly overcoming stereotypes."

Salma Yaqoob, Comment is free... *Guardian Blog*, 4 July 2007

"...it is right that people who come to and are in this country to stay, learn English, have some sense of what it means to be British, of our history and our culture and - through citizenship tests and citizenship ceremonies - take British citizenship seriously."

Gordon Brown, 25 September 2006, speech to Labour Party Conference

"...our national identity is essentially about the way we treat each other. In a phrase: British is as British does. It is about what people do, not who they are."

Trevor Phillips, *Britishness and Integration*, in "Britishness: Towards a progressive citizenship", published by the Smith Institute (2007), p. 42.

"The "Life in the UK" test is the way in which prospective citizens are asked to demonstrate their understanding of what it means to be a British citizen. If you can cram for exams, read basic English and navigate a mildly complicated computer program, you should do fine. These seem rather weak qualifications to judge whether one is suitably prepared to take on the roles and responsibilities of citizenship, but such emphasis is placed on the test that the experience is deeply nerve-wracking."

Abdul-Rehman Malik, from the programme for *Testing the Echo*, 2008

"As levels of ethnic segregation and community tension increase across Britain, the government is right to focus on the ties that bind us as a nation. But vague notions of citizenship are not enough. We need stories, milestones, battles, heroes, villains and some of the passion of the past which helped to make modern Britain, warts and all. And we need to begin in the history classroom, not the town hall citizenship seminar."
Tristram Hunt, *The Observer*, 10 June 2007

"Citizenship cannot be a stick to beat Muslims with ... but if we all work together, count me in."
Asghar Bukhari, interview at Out of Joint, 25 April 2006

"It is self-evidently impossible to engage people if they do not understand not only that they can influence the course of events that affect their lives but also how it can be done - being taught, as the idea's godfather Professor Bernard Crick has said, both to respect the law and to know how to try to change it."
Leader in *The Guardian*, 29 September 2006

"...the BBC keep on calling it a 'Britishness test', and I keep on telling them it bloody well isn't a Britishness test, it's a test of useful information, useful for settling in, useful for learning the habits and behaviour of the Brits."
Bernard Crick, interview with Australian radio station ABC, 28 April 2007

"There are times when I wish we would stop this obsessive naval-gazing about our identity ... We should refrain from the embarrassing habit of declaring ourselves the best at everything, yet also delight in the many things we are good at."
Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Catalyst*, 23 March 2006

"In the handwringing over national values, we forget that nations and nationalisms are not static. Values are best developed as a result of vigorous debate, not social engineering."
Abdul-Rehman Malik, from the programme for *Testing the Echo*, 2008

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Do you agree with the British citizenship tests? What do you think is the point of the tests?
2. Do you think it is possible to define Britishness? Try and come up with your own definitions.
3. What reasons do you think people have for wanting to become British? What reasons do the characters in *Testing the Echo* have?
4. Try and design your own plan for people wishing to settle in Britain. Would you test people? Would you make people take English classes? Or would you do something else entirely...

5. Interview with David Edgar, the Writer

Why did you write this play now?

David: Gordon Brown in early 2006 made a speech in which he said that Britishness was a very important political issue, standing in front of a union flag which was a very odd thing traditionally for a leader of the Labour Party to do, because Labour has always felt the flag was a bit tainted by nationalism. So that seemed to be an important moment and then the debate about Britishness after 7/7 became very caught up in the issue of Muslims in particular and whether or not there were people in British society who didn't want to be British and whether that mattered and whether or not we were in Trevor Phillips', the Head of the Commission for Racial Equality, phrase "sleepwalking into segregation" and so it did seem to be timely and I don't think it's become any less timely in the last year.

How did you approach writing the play?

David: I've traditionally written what you'd call realist plays. I really wanted, as you do at certain points in your career, to try to do something a bit different. Many different people are wanting to become British citizens, or are learning to become British citizens so I decided I'd take a number of different stories and not just people learning but also the people who drew up the British citizenship test and the citizenship tests in other countries - all kinds of material about the same subject but coming from lots of very different angles - and I'd cut them up so they'd become almost like a film or a television soap opera, where you can move from story to story. And I thought that would lead to some quite interesting links and comparisons between the different stories. So I guess as I approach the age of sixty, which I am next month, I'm going backwards and trying to write like a younger writer again, but trying to write in a more modern, contemporary way. Every so often you need to try something different. And I think although Out of Joint is as prominent a company as the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare Company because it's a smaller company, I feel freer about being a little more experimental than perhaps if I was doing a play for the main stage of the National Theatre.

You did a lot of research for this play didn't you, which is part of Out of Joint's ethos.

David: Yes, in fact I'd done quite a lot of research on the topic anyway before this started, it's something that interested me and indeed to a certain extent this is a follow-on to a play I did write for the National called *Playing with Fire*, which is about the 2001 riots in Bradford and Burnley, which were, to use a phrase I hate, a sort of wake-up call for people who felt that multiculturalism was working really well. And I think a lot of conclusions that were drawn from those riots were wrong but certainly it did demonstrate that there were people who identified themselves no longer as Asians but as Muslims and of course those riots occurred three months before 9/11 which also confirmed that point of view. For this play, we got together with a group of actors, all of whom devoted themselves

very assiduously to the project, and who did a number of rehearsal room interviews which is the Out of Joint method. The other thing that happened is that actors went off to interview people and then everybody would report back and, in fact, act out the interviews, which is rather wonderful for a writer. Then we did a couple of shorter workshops, which weren't so much about research and much more about experimenting with ways to do the script. Because the play in addition to having a number of different strands, also has a number of styles - and a mock documentary style - and one of the things we were doing with the actors during the rehearsal process is experimenting with how to realise the various different theatrical styles in the play. We've just been rehearsing a scene with three historians. Having given individual speeches to the audience they then start arguing with each other but in fact they're being interviewed separately; it's as if you're watching a split three-way screen. The director has brought on two civil servants who are there listening to these three arguments being presented, instead of being presented to the audience, so it's an argument between three people in separate rooms.

How has the process changed, or has it changed your notion of Britishness?

David: I'm somebody who is instinctively suspicious of patriotism and nationalism, and thinks that I probably have more in common with people in Manhattan and San Francisco than I might with people in Knightsbridge or Aberdeen and that nonetheless there are things about being British that I find are very important. And then the other thing is confronting the great contradiction I think any progressive person now has over Islam because I do feel naturally defensive of a group of people who are being demonised and attacked but on the other hand what they are attacked for sometimes is holding opinions that I don't agree with. So in a way the play's an attempt to dramatize a conflict within myself about Britishness. A very attractive prospect: come and watch the battle going on inside David Edgar's head!

How would you like the audience to respond?

David: Well the one thing that this play accidentally has done more than I've ever done before is show off the skills of actors. I hope that everything you do is only completed by actors but particularly here because there are lots of short scenes - and the director's done wonderful things shifting from scene to scene in a very economical, deft and often amusing way - but also within the scenes actors play so many different parts. One of the strands is a dinner party argument which I've tried to write as dinner party arguments always are, in which people are constantly overlapping. It's incredibly difficult to act and in one case they're doing that when there's another scene going on in somebody's head and when it really flies you're just sitting dazzled by the skill of the actors. I hope you're also listening to what they're saying but I hope the audience will delight in watching a very simple set of resources, eight actors, tiny bits of costume, a screen, some projections, very little other set, and just seeing these actors take that space and transform it into all sorts of different spaces.

6. Interview with Matthew Dunster, the Director

What attracted you to this play?

Matthew: Well I think the best way to try and understand something is to direct it. I certainly wasn't on top of the arguments made within the play when we started so that just became a journey of discovery. And I just thought it was dead hard, I thought it was a really really really difficult task and I get pulled towards those things.



Does the fact that you're an actor affect the way in which you direct?

Matthew: I think it must because I don't know how I can separate the two. I think I have a knowledge of what the actors need, which isn't necessarily what they think they need. But I try and have fun with them and the key thing is I'm very open. I don't understand things often and it's their interpretation or their examination of the text which is the biggest way of me understanding and getting to grips with what is going on.

It's collaborative.

Matthew: Absolutely. And the thing I say a lot to actors, certainly in the early stages is "I don't know" and then when they look terrified "But we don't need to know ... yet".

What's been the biggest challenge of this particular play?

Matthew: I suppose just the actual number of scenes. For a play of its length the amount of scenes is out of proportion so it's very hard to get hold of the arc of it because it's separated into so many little pieces.

How do you cope with that?

Matthew: Well we're in the process of coping with it, again it's hard to know what you've got until you've sat back and watched the whole thing a couple of times and we haven't actually done that yet, we've only done one stagger-through which revealed certain things - mainly that the little pieces need to be pulled closer together. So it's difficult because the number of scenes means that the scenes themselves are short, but the emotional journeys within the scenes haven't necessarily been robbed by the brevity so you've still got to do all that work. And the actors have got to get over the fact that in a 45-second scene, they've got to show development and that's probably after just having done a 15-second scene change so they're disorientated before they get in the scene and then the scene's over before they realise it. So that's the big challenge.

One of the great aspects is the theatricality of the show - you see actors really plying their craft.

Matthew: Absolutely. I mean this is sort of a terrible confession, but I suppose my favourite part of directing is scene changes. Because that's when you really can unapologetically be puppet-master. "Stand over

there", "Why?" "Because it looks better", and in a scene change they'll be more ready to do it.

Well the scene changes are really key to this production, they're part of the whole aesthetic.

Matthew: Absolutely. Scene changes have always been the bit where in my productions the play stopped for a little bit and I've shown everybody what I can do. In this production they have to be invisible, they have to be occurring behind the action so the play doesn't stop, wherever that's possible.

Has doing the play changed your attitudes to Britishness at all?

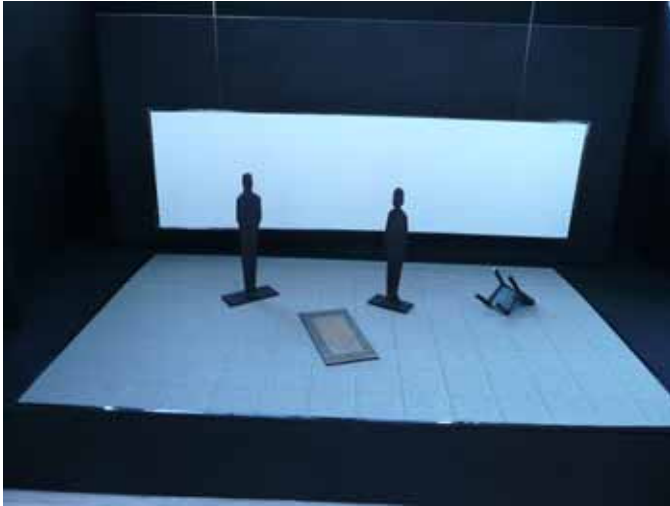
Matthew: Yeah I suppose so. I'm quite patriotic anyway I think in terms of how we have arrived at our sense of Britishness and that ever-evolving idea of what Britishness is. I suppose I'm, it's difficult... I'm proud of being English. I'm as proud of being English as I am of being British and that gives you a real freedom to let other people enjoy being Scottish or Welsh or French or Tasmanian or whatever, and I'm proud of our history with regards to immigration and that hasn't been diminished at all by this play. I share the central argument of the play as I see it, which is that irrespective of the problems that come with a large Muslim community living in this country at this time in history, there is a liberal anxiety that keeps debate alive, that keeps humanity present in how people are dealt with. I suppose I think that lands quite firmly at the centre of my own feelings and my own argument but I wouldn't have been able to voice them. Plays come along, arguments come along, where you find yourself thinking, "Oh yeah, that's what I think". I just think once you're here you're part of the mix and that's fantastic and I think the right-wing part of me that I need to scratch is in that Toby Blair line that's at the end of the play, "If you don't like it then don't come here".

Do you have any idea how you'd like the audience to respond?

Matthew: I've got no idea to be honest and also I've never taken anything on tour before in this country, so I think that's going to be very interesting. If I do a show for the Young Vic or the Bush I kind of know what I'm doing but this is different. I think I'm talking about the metropolis so when you ask me about my idea of Britishness it is from that metropolitan perspective as well as being from a northern perspective. I want them to have a good time first and foremost. I think the big healthy difference between David and I is that I'm a showman and I make no apologies for that. I have to understand something in order to make it work but my real skills are making things work. In order to make manifest the ideas of the play in a practical sense, I've got to understand the play but I just can't wait to get all that out of the way so I can start making a piece of theatre. It's very interesting, from my perspective I usually talk about theatre and I usually talk about shows and certainly David because he's an author and *Out of Joint* because of its history talk about the play, that's been an interesting mind-shift for me. Yes, so I want the audience to be affected by this as a piece of theatre, by how it's presented to them, by what is presented to them in terms of ideas. I don't know!

7. Interview with the Designer, Paul Wills

How did you come up with the design/concept for the production? And how closely did you work with the director?



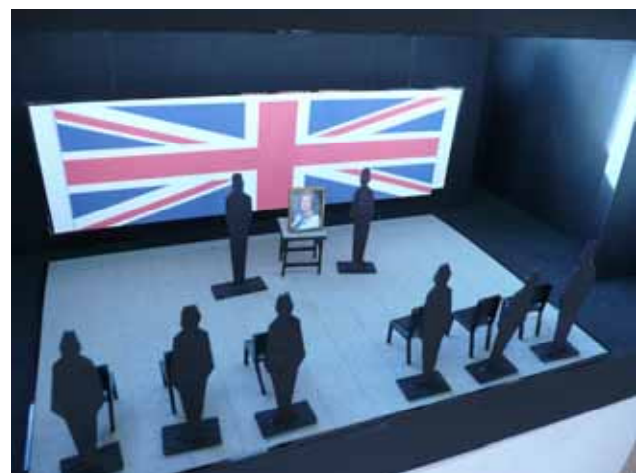
Paul: We decided very early on that the best way to approach this was to meet as a creative team before coming up with any design ideas and see what came from that. I hope that the design feels collaborative and is brought to life by all the design elements. We knew very early that a projection screen or surface was needed to project on so this affected the design.

Very early on Matthew said that he saw 'chairs and tables' and quite rightly these were all the elements we needed! By careful positioning he was able to change the feel of the space by the pattern of chairs, which meant we could avoid having any messy set changes and could allow the actors to move between a canteen and an ESOL class by moving 2 chairs!

We decided to keep the design monochromatic, and then bring colour to each location so the audience would be able to easily identify where they were because of a blue mug or an orange work vest for example. We also used this approach with the costumes, where only one small change could change character; in some examples this is as quick as doing up a top button.

What was the greatest challenge and how did you solve it?

Paul: I think the greatest challenge was the play itself. After reading it my first thought was 'this is brilliant' my second thought was 'how on earth can we do this?!' The best thing when that happens is to sit down with an empty model box and some small cardboard cut-outs of the actors and to see what's needed. We realised very early on that the answer was not much and that we should keep it simple all the way. The same with costume, we started with quite big ideas that ended up getting in the way so again we stripped it all back and hopefully it works!



What role does your set design play in the production?
I'm hoping my role is unnoticeable! I hope it serves the play well and allows the play to be accessible and understandable. I wanted it to be very functional and although every element has been carefully thought about, if anyone notices the 'design' then I have probably failed!

Why did you decide to use the giant screen?

The size of the floor came first, I looked at how much room was needed with 8 chairs and the actors, and the screen really came from these dimensions, 7m wide. I got quite excited by just two elements 'floating' in the space, the screen and the floor. The screen is giant but I hope elegant as well! To create this 'floating effect' we have masked off the entire theatre so the set lives in a black void brought to life by light, projection and sound.



8. Rehearsal Diary

- Thursday, 6th December

The first week of rehearsals involves the actors, director and writer sitting in a circle and reading through the text. This allows everyone to check their understanding of the play and to raise any questions they have. This is useful both for the actors and for the writer as it allows David to gauge how an audience will receive the play. The actors also use this time to fill in some of their characters' backstories. Sushil [Sushil Chudasama, Mahmood] was particularly keen to pinpoint his character's history, how old Mahmood was when he came over to England and at what age he had visited the different places mentioned in the play. Mahmood wants to gain British citizenship to please his dad and the company discussed what they imagined Mahmood's dad's attitude to the United Kingdom would have been and how this had in turn affected Mahmood's own feelings about the country. It was decided that Mahmood's dad had enjoyed the traditions and history of the UK, an enjoyment he had transmitted to his son.



Syrus Lowe & Sushil Chudasama

Rather than a linear reading of the play, some of the read-throughs were dedicated to one particular strand. The work today was on the Mahmood-Jamal storyline and the company discussed the evolution of the relationship between the two men. Running the scenes together allows the actors to see the power shift that occurs as Mahmood comes off drugs and regains his energy and focus. These changes can be communicated by very minor and subtle aspects of the script. For example, when Jamal offers to bring Mahmood his usual soup and Mahmood asks for pizza this is a sign that Mahmood is beginning to regain his independence.



Syrus Lowe & Sushil Chudasama

Matthew felt it signified the impending shift of power. Sushil and Syrus [Syrus Lowe, Jamal] were unsure as to the meaning of Mahmood's suggestion that the pizza be topped with asparagus. As Jamal had previously offered asparagus soup, David [David Edgar, the writer] said he saw this as a kindness to Jamal therefore showing Mahmood starting to think about others; another sign of his growing independence. It is through discussion of these finer matters of the script that the basis for the wider arc of the story can be constructed. Looking at this line individually also allowed the actors to see the correspondence between the shifting power

relationship between Mahmood and Jamal and that of Emma and Nasim; both lines show the pupil gaining control.

To aid the actors to find their characters, Matthew divided the group into three and asked everyone to think of one item of clothing which they would associate with Mahmood, Jamal and Bernie (the three characters in this strand). This helps everyone to come up with a representative image of their character - particularly useful when the actors are playing multiple roles.

I am constantly re-understanding the text. You think you know what a scene is about, then you and the director discover something and it changes the scene and your character's journey. This show has been physically challenging and it has been fun to experiment with different physicalities for my characters. I look forward to refining my ability to put a chair in the right place, I imagine I will have this down about two months into the tour!

Syrus Lowe

- **Friday, 14th December**

This afternoon's rehearsal was dedicated to a run-through of the first few scenes. Matthew began by warming up the actors with a game of volleyball and then let them perform what they had rehearsed that week uninterrupted. After this the whole company discussed what had and hadn't worked. Most of the notes were about pace and scale. It is only clear when the scenes are run together where the actors need to slow down and where they need to speed up. In the first scene, Matthew and David encouraged the actors to eliminate the pauses completely so that the splicing between the Citizenship ceremony and the testimonies of the new citizens was seamless. This would ensure the audience understands that the testimonies are the thoughts of the new citizens during the ceremony.



Kirsty Bushell

- **Wednesday, 19th December**

Having rehearsed the dinner party sequence, the aim for today was to integrate Nasim's interventions into the scene. Matthew suggested that at first Sirine (Sirine Saba, **Nasim**) should remain seated and gradually become more present. The first moment when Nasim really impinges on Emma's thoughts is when Emma finally acknowledges her on "Yes Nasim". Matthew asked Sirine and Teresa (Teresa Banham, **Emma**) to make this moment into a face-off. He suggested the actresses discover the correct attitude through playing the scene. Having run this moment a couple of times, Sirine felt that she and Teresa were too close. They tried again but this time Sirine distanced herself from Emma; this made the moment stronger because the

two actresses held each others' attention over a greater area of the stage. It also made the moment more balanced between the two scenes, that of the dinner party and that of the ESOL class. Balancing the energy between the spliced scenes is very important and Matthew reminded the actors that they have to listen very carefully to each other to ensure they maintain the same rhythm.



Sirine Saba

Matthew often asks the actors "What are you playing?" to force them to examine their intentions. For example when Nasim asks Emma, "Do you have children?", Matthew asked Sirine what Nasim's reasons for this question are and why this is an important question for her. This exchange between Nasim and Emma contains a lot of subtext; it is a verbal battle and forcing the actors to question each line allows them to see what the stages in that battle are. Matthew asked Sirine to throw out Nasim's references to Toby's "streak" like a dart; it is her attack. This verbal duel is matched by a physical battle to dominate the spatial relations on stage. At the beginning, Nasim is constantly trying to draw Emma onto her side of the stage. It is a triumph for her when Emma crosses over. Nasim then addresses her words to the audience, rather than to Emma, forcing Emma to come in towards her. Finally, on "That's not what I mean" Matthew suggested Nasim turn her back on Emma. This is a very powerful position, placing Nasim in control; especially when she then chooses to turn and face Emma down.

- **Thursday, 20th December**

Matthew began with a warm-up for the actors. This involved continually repeating the phrase "Jack and Jill went up the hill, they went to get a pizza, to get a pizza" but each time replacing some of the words with movement, so by stamping the feet or tapping the hands on the ground. This helped the actors not only to warm up but to listen and work with each other with the same rhythm.

The company then went on to work on the ESOL class scene in which Nasim first challenges Emma's authority by refusing to discuss the cards with images of objects representing Britishness on them. When Nasim announces "This goes against my religion", Matthew suggested Nasim address this to the rest of the class, turning



Kirsty Bushell, Sushil Chudasama & Farzana Dua Elahe

her back on Emma. She should then continue to pursue her recruitment of the others. Matthew asked each actor to decide how their character would react to Nasim's revolt, and therefore to think about their relationship with Nasim, how much they would know about the Toby incident and what had



Teresa Banham

gone on before between Emma and Nasim. Having run the scene a couple of times Matthew warned the actors about "putting air between their lines", asking them to ensure that they kept up the pace. He also advised Sirine to allow Nasim to follow her own agenda only, to make her movements bigger. He asked Teresa to make Emma's reactions bigger also to give Nasim something to push against. He also encouraged Teresa to make sure that Emma is always in "teacher mode"; the scene should not become sentimental and Emma should always be aware of her position of authority as a teacher.

- **Friday, 21st December**

Testing the Echo requires the actors to take on lots of different roles and to change between characters very quickly so Matthew devised an exercise to help the actors do this effectively and economically. He asked all the actors to stand and to repeat a line from one of their characters whilst trying to work out which part of the body would lead their character and adopt a pose to suggest this. When he clapped his hands the actors had to change character. He then asked them to strike a silent pose when he clapped but to really exaggerate the physicality they had found for each of their characters. Then on the clap they had to move from one character pose to the next. Matthew finally asked the actors to match the statue with the line so that physicality combined with voice. He explained that the actors would need to keep this exercise going in performance so that the physicality and the voice arrive immediately at the point of character change. As soon as the character arrives the audience must be able to recognise them.

It is the first run. I am soon in trouble. I foolishly get into my Ranjit costume for the first ESOL class, and only realise my mistake when I notice Sirine (She Who Can Do No Wrong) Saba is in her high viz jacket - I should be too. At the end of the scene I have 2 ½ seconds to change. I rip off my anorak and specs and arrive late in the canteen scene just in time to realise that I should have kept my glasses for the historian I am about to become. Inwardly I curse Edgar and Dunster for inventing this particularly cruel instrument of torture. I glance at Dunster. He looks delighted to see me in complete disarray. The cast look sympathetic, yet smug. Hey-ho.

Robert Gwilym

- Thursday, 3rd January

The actors were rehearsing the first scene of the play, obviously one of the most crucial as it must grab the audience's attention. The most important work was done on getting the right balance of power and emotion between Mahmood and Jamal. Naomi (Naomi Jones, assistant director) pointed out that when Jamal removes Mahmood's balaclava he should not throw it at Mahmood as this looks provocative and aggressive whereas those possessed of real religious zeal are often calm and controlled. Matthew agreed and reminded Syrus that Jamal is the controller not the aggressor and told him not to "feed the fight" of Mahmood. Playing in this way allows Sushil (Mahmood) to raise his emotional state as well; he becomes wilder because Jamal refuses to react. Matthew explained to Sushil that Mahmood should be responsible for the panic. To help Syrus find the right tone Matthew asked him what he thought was most important to Jamal; this is of course his religion. Naomi suggested that Jamal would believe that by bringing Mahmood back to the Islamic faith he was giving him a great gift and this should inform the way he treats Mahmood.



Ian Dunn & Farzana Dua Elahe



The two Editions of Life in the UK: Syrus & Kirsty

- Tuesday, 8th January

In the final week of rehearsal everyone was working on fine-tuning. One of the most difficult scenes in the play is the first dinner party scene and Matthew and the cast were working hard to ensure none of the nuances were lost. For example they looked at the evolution of the relationship between Pauline and Ian, at what points Pauline enlists him as an ally and at what points she blocks him completely. The other focus of this particular rehearsal was to make the scene "bubble" as Matthew put it. He said it was important that the actors enjoy themselves at first; so Kirsty should make Pauline's "Well I rest my case" much more celebratory and encouraged her to find a large gesture to show her jubilation, including getting up from the table, when she tells Martin "Welcome to the tribe!" This emphasis on the banter makes the transition into serious debate later on in the play more remarkable. This gear change should take place at the end of this scene when Pauline provocatively asks "What if Wednesday you're a Muslim?"

The joy of this rehearsal process for me has been the dance between all the different characters we play... From perching a pair of glasses on your nose to covering your head in a hijab (headscarf) you launch yourself from a crusty Historian, to a flirty Londoner, to an intense Egyptian immigrant. I love that! The speed with which we fly through the play and visit all these people is also very exciting, with Matthew providing much-needed inspiration. Working on the play has also taught me so much I did not know about Britain, being British and of course, citizenship. I grew up in Cyprus and therefore began this rehearsal process with very little background knowledge on ANYTHING to do with anything! I now know about the Magna Carta, John Major's speech, citizenship questions oh everything! I have also been blown away by the intricacy, detail and scale of David's writing regarding the subject of this play and its characters. It's been such a real thrill to immerse myself in this contemporary, current world.

Sirine Saba



The cast warm up with Matthew Dunster



Bob Gwilym's Mayor addresses the new citizens

9. Practical Exercises

WARM-UP: Get in a circle. Pass a “clap” round the group. Clap three to receive the clap and twice to pass it on. Make sure you make eye contact with the person to whom you are sending the “clap”. Now change it to a click. The idea is to work as a team to transmit the click. Now break the circle and move around the room passing a single click this time. TIP: it will only work if you make eye contact with each other and follow carefully the journey of the “click”. Think about how you can employ this when you are acting: making eye contact, affecting other people, working as a team and as a company.

a. RESEARCH...

Take one of the ESOL classes in the play and divide the characters amongst your group. For your character research your country of origin, e.g. Samir - Iran, Nasim - Egypt, Halima - Somalia. What religion would that character be? What is the political situation of that country? Why might they be in the UK? With this information write a monologue for your character explaining why you want to become a British citizen. Choose other countries and repeat the research task.

b. ...and DEVELOPMENT

Now improvise an ESOL class scene. Use scene 52 from *Testing the Echo* as a template. The class are discussing the Shabina Begum case. Decide which characters would agree/disagree with the school's decision.

c. BUILD YOUR OWN CHARACTERS

Choose 4 characters from *Testing the Echo* for yourself, try to vary the ages and backgrounds. Then think of a line of dialogue to match each of your characters (not one from the text) and find a voice for each one. Try moving quickly from one character to the next, note what happens to your body when you change to the voice of a different character. Now try and formalise a pose for each character and change from pose to pose without the voice. Think about where the character's centre is. Are they led by the head? Perhaps if they are proud, they are led by the chest. Perhaps if they are strong then the pose is very physically demanding. Put the voice and pose together and finally make your character move. In small groups take it in turns to perform your characters and see if the others can identify which character you are performing. Initially just use movement and physical representation, then add voice. To test out your character building skills further, why not choose a different group of people to use, for example, members of your class, or teachers at your school.

d. BUILD YOUR OWN SET

The set for *Testing the Echo* is very simple and involves principally configurations of chairs. One of the exercises Matthew asked the actors to do very early on was to build tableaux of scenes using only chairs and their own bodies. In small groups try doing this yourselves. Take a scene from the play, a chair per person, and create a tableau to depict that scene. You can use the physical character work from the previous exercise to help you. In turn, each group should show their tableau and ask the audience if they can see what scene is being shown. In small groups you can then try telling a different story, create perhaps 5 or 6 different tableaux. Find a story that illustrates an aspect of Britishness.