

Fuel in association with Touring Together presents

Once Upon a Time in Sokoto

A play by Inua Ellams, directed by Roy Alexander Weise

Produced by Fuel



Image by Myah Jeffers

About Touring Together

Touring Together is a China Plate and Fuel initiative in collaboration with Brighton Dome, Leeds Playhouse, Oxford Playhouse, Royal and Derngate, Northampton and Warwick Arts Centre, generously supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

About Once Upon a Time in Sokoto

"There are powers that bind the world together, softer than spirits yet stronger than stone, that tie the river to the tree, the tree to rain clouds, rain clouds to the land, and people to each other."

The award-winning *Once Upon a Time in Sokoto* tells the epic story of a beautiful but unlikely friendship forged between an enslaved woman and her former master. Differences in faith, culture and heritage are overcome in the face of new enemies, in a gripping family drama set against the backdrop of events leading to the creation of Nigeria.

Winner of the 2024 Alfred Fagon Award for Once Upon a Time in Sokoto, Nigeria-born Inua Ellams is an internationally celebrated poet, playwright, and artist. He has published four poetry collections, and his plays include the hugely popular and critically acclaimed Barber Shop Chronicles (Fuel/National Theatre, UK and International tour) and the award-winning The 14th Tale (Fuel/UK tour) and his retelling of Three Sisters (National Theatre).



"Such an ambitious piece and so life-affirmingly realised. Go."
The Independent on *Barber Shop Chronicles*

"This is a work, full of humanity and glancing wit, that one can imagine traveling far and wide."
The New York Times on *Barber Shop Chronicles*

Once Upon a Time in Sokoto is presented in association with Touring Together - a new national programme, bringing bold stories which shine a fresh light on the world we live in today, to audiences across the country.

Once Upon a Time in Sokoto is supported by the Garrick Charitable Trust.

About this Resource Pack

This Resource Pack was created by Creative Learning Specialist, Stella Odunlami. Stella Odunlami is an artist, academic and cultural strategist working across performance, higher education and cultural leadership. She collaborates with universities, arts organisations and cultural institutions to develop creative practice, curriculum, organisational strategy and change. Her practice explores memory, performance, cultural identity and the staging of marginalised voices through interdisciplinary and pedagogical approaches.

Organisations she has worked with include: Third World Bunfight, The Royal National Theatre, The Yard Theatre, The Barbican, Theatre Royal Stratford East, Clean Break, The Almeida, Gate Theatre, Hoxton Hall, The Lyric Hammersmith, Sky Arts, Wildworks, The PappyShow, CEDAS, Hackney Empire, Shunt and BBC 1xtra, UAL and Goldsmiths University. She has undertaken a NECAH funded PhD with the University of Hull exploring the potential for performance-based memorials.

Using This Resource

This resource pack supports the following KS3/4 subjects and themes:

English (reading, interpretation, context, analysis)

Drama (character, performance, staging, design)

History (empire, colonialism, historical interpretation)

PSHE/Citizenship (identity, leadership, justice, community)

Religious Education (belief systems, ethics, religion and society)

This resource pack has been designed to be used flexibly.

Teachers may choose to use a single activity before or after seeing the production or select individual sections that support longer schemes of work across English, Drama, History, RE or PSHE. The activities are intended to stand alone as well as complement one another.

Before, Before

Before Nigeria existed as a country.

Before Coca-Cola was bottled.

Before women won the vote in Britain.

Before Nigeria became independent.

Before Boko Haram.

There was the Sokoto Caliphate.

Once Upon a Time in Sokoto tells the story of an unlikely friendship enslaved woman and her former master A bond forged under the most challenging of circumstances, as the world around them is transformed and ultimately wrestled from them.

Through four storytellers, each with their own varied and contested relationship to Nigeria, the play journeys across four decades of history. Set against the backdrop of expanding trade, competing empires, and British colonial expansion, it follows the extraordinary relationship between Zinari, the daughter of a wealthy merchant, and Nafisa, a woman enslaved as a child, as their lives become irrevocably entwined.

Along the way, the play asks difficult questions about power, memory, education, faith, identity, gender, leadership, freedom, and what it means to survive profound change. It invites us to consider not only how modern Nigeria came to be, but also what existed before, what was lost, what endured, and why the stories we tell about the past still matter.

Characters in the world of Once Upon a Time in Sokoto

Zinari is an 'upper class' character, a step below royalty, who derives strength and power from existing and operating within society, trying to bend it to her will. She is radical only in her approach to business, corporate social responsibility and education.

Think Michelle Obama / Margaret Thatcher / Beyonce / Aretha

Franklin.

Nafisa is a 'lower class' character, a slave and later, a step above the slaves, who derives strength from existing and operating outside society; trying to burn it all down. She is extremely radical in her approach to commerce, capitalism and religious belief. Think Harriet Tubman / Joan Of Arch / Rhianna / Grace Jones.

Hadiru is a well-intentioned 'middle-class' character, looking for ways to rise above his status, who is eventually corrupted by his lust for power and influence. Think Kanye West / Little Finger / Boromir / White House Chief Of Staff.

Yusef is an intelligent, British-educated, 'working class' character, looking to minimise the chaos that he knows is bound to come. He doesn't care for power or influence.
Think Lupe Fiasco / Tyrion Lannister / Samwise Gamgee / Community Liaison Volunteer.

What was the Sokoto Caliphate?

Founded in 1804 by the Islamic scholar and teacher Usman dan Fodio, the Sokoto Caliphate became one of the largest and most influential states in nineteenth-century Africa. Stretching across much of present-day northern Nigeria and into parts of neighbouring countries, it was made up of more than thirty emirates connected through trade, scholarship and Islamic governance. At its height, it was home to more than ten million people, making it one of the largest and most powerful states on the African continent.

A Centre of Learning

The Sokoto Caliphate was renowned as a centre of learning and scholarship. Qur'anic schools flourished, poetry and philosophy were highly valued, and knowledge was recorded using Ajami, the practice of writing African languages using the Arabic script. Education was an important part of everyday life, although access to learning was shaped by gender, class and religion.

A Centre of Trade

Trade connected the Sokoto Caliphate to North Africa and beyond. Merchants travelled across the Sahara exchanging gold, leather, indigo-dyed textiles, leather, livestock, salt and other goods. Markets were vibrant spaces where languages, cultures and ideas met, making cities such as Sokoto and Kano important centres of commerce as well as learning.

A Diverse Society

The Caliphate was home to many different peoples, languages and beliefs. Hausa and Fulani, Nupe and Igbale communities lived alongside many others. Some people were merchants, farmers, scholars and craftspeople; others were rulers, soldiers or enslaved people. Like many large societies, it contained different cultures, competing ideas and unequal distributions of power.

A Complex Society

Like many societies across the world during the nineteenth century, systems of slavery existed within the Sokoto Caliphate. *Once Upon a Time in Sokoto* explores different experiences of enslavement, including slavery within the Hausa states, slavery within the Caliphate, the trans-Saharan slave trade and the growing impact of the transatlantic slave trade. These systems were not identical, and one

of the central questions of the play is how different forms of power, oppression and resistance shaped people's lives.

Why does this matter now?

The events explored in *Once Upon a Time in Sokoto* continue to shape the world we live in today. Many of the political, cultural and social changes that began during this period continue to influence how Nigeria is understood, how its histories are told, and how people from the region are represented.

The play reminds us that history is rarely simple. Different people remember the past in different ways, and the stories we inherit often depend on who was able to tell them, record them and preserve them. By revisiting this moment in history, *Once Upon a Time in Sokoto* invites us to ask not only what happened, but also whose stories have been remembered, whose have been forgotten, and why that matters today.

TASK 1: Before You Watch: Whose Story Is It?

Activity Type: Drama, storytelling and discussion

Suggested age: Key Stages 3 and 4

Subject links: Drama, English, History, PSHE/Citizenship

Duration: Drama Activity 50–60 minutes; discussion Activity 20–25 minutes. You may wish to complete both activities or use the discussion activity as a shorter alternative to the practical drama exercise.

Resources: Open classroom space; chairs or classroom objects if useful

DRAMA ACTIVITY 50–60 minutes

Personal memories (10 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of five.

Ask each student to describe a memorable first day: their first day at primary school, secondary school, a new club, a new home, or another unfamiliar place.

Allow roughly two minutes per person. Encourage them to include:

What happened;

Who was present;

What they noticed;

How they felt before and during the experience;

One detail they remember particularly clearly- an item they were wearing, the weather, what they ate for breakfast that day etc.

Students should only share experiences they are comfortable discussing.

Select one story (2 minutes)

Each group chooses one of the stories to develop.

They should decide which people were involved and cast group members as the storyteller and the other characters present.

Identify the two perspectives (5 minutes)

The original storyteller explains how they remember the event.

The group then chooses another person who features in the story who might remember it differently: a parent, sibling, teacher, friend, or another child.

You might ask:

What might that person have noticed instead?

What might they not have known?

How might their feelings have shaped their memory?

Which details might both people agree happened?

Create two versions (10–12 minutes)

Each group prepares two short scenes showing the same event from differing perspectives:

Version one, from the original storyteller's perspective.

Version two, from another person's perspective.

The main facts should remain recognisable, but differences in mood, emphasis, language, gesture or interpretation should become visible.

Each version should last no more than one or two minutes.

Share the scenes (15–20 minutes)

Groups perform both versions without initially explaining what they changed.

After each group's performance of the two scenes, invite the class to identify:

What remained the same;

What changed;

Which details seemed factual;

Which details appeared shaped by emotion or perspective;

How acting choices helped distinguish the two accounts.

For a larger class, divide the groups between two performance areas, or ask each group to share only a short extract.

Closing discussion (8–10 minutes)

You might discuss:

Where does the truth live when two people remember the same event differently?

Can both accounts be truthful without being identical?

How might nervousness, excitement, hunger, embarrassment or fear shape what someone notices?

How can we distinguish between an agreed fact and an interpretation?

Whose version is most likely to be recorded or believed?

What happens to the other version?

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY 20-25 MINUTES

Before your theatre visit, working in pairs or small groups, spend a few minutes talking about your memories.

Pair or small group discussion (8-10 minutes)

You might discuss:

What do you remember most clearly?

What was your first impression of the people around you?

Were you excited, nervous or unsure?

Do you remember the same events in the same way?

What thoughts, feelings or opinions have since changed?

Whole class discussion (10-12 minutes)

As a class, discuss:

Did anyone's memories contain similar details, feelings or experiences?

If two people remember the same event differently, who is telling the truth?

What shapes the stories we tell about our lives?

How do our experiences, identities and perspectives influence what we remember?

Closing Reflection (2-3 minutes)

Ask students to identify one detail they believe is factual and one detail that may have been shaped by feeling, interpretation or perspective.

TASK 2: As You Watch Once Upon a Time in Sokoto

As you watch *Once Upon a Time in Sokoto*, notice the questions, images and moments that stay with you. You do not need to answer every question.

Which histories are being told?

Which histories are being challenged or contested?

Who gets to tell the story, and whose voices are missing?

Whose version of events do you find yourself believing, and why?

How do different characters understand power, freedom and justice?

What role do storytelling, education and memory play throughout the play?

How do Zinari and Nafisa change? What changes them?

Which moments in the play feel most relevant to the world we live in today?

Glossary

Ajami

A writing system that uses the Arabic alphabet to write African languages, including Hausa. Before British colonisation, many books, poems and official records in the Sokoto Caliphate were written in Ajami.

Boko

The Hausa word originally used to describe Western-style education and, later, the Latin alphabet introduced through colonial rule. In the play, Boko symbolises the changing of language, education and power.

Bori

A traditional Hausa spiritual belief system centred on spirit possession, healing, music, dance and community. Before the spread of Islam, Bori was widely practised across Hausaland and was often led by women.

Caliphate

A state or empire led according to Islamic principles. The Sokoto Caliphate was one of the largest and most influential states in nineteenth-century Africa.

Cowries

Small shells once widely used as money across West Africa. In the play, cowries represent trade, wealth and the ways colonial powers manipulated local economies.

Emir

A ruler or governor of an emirate (a region or province). The Sokoto Caliphate was made up of many emirates governed by emirs.

Emirate

A territory ruled by an emir. Together, more than thirty emirates formed the Sokoto Caliphate.

Fulani

One of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa. Usman dan Fodio and many of the leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate were Fulani.

Hausa

One of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa. The Hausa states existed before the Sokoto Caliphate and remain an important part of Nigeria's history and culture today.

Ifa

A Yoruba spiritual and philosophical tradition based on wisdom, divination and the teachings of the Orisha. Yussef refers to Ifa as part of his own heritage.

Imam

A Muslim religious leader who leads prayers and provides spiritual guidance.

Islam

A monotheistic religion founded in the seventh century. Islam played a central role in the government, education and daily life of the Sokoto Caliphate.

Jihad

Literally meaning *struggle* or *striving* in Arabic. In this play, the term refers to the nineteenth-century Fulani jihad that led to the founding of the Sokoto Caliphate. The word has different meanings in different contexts.

Jaji

A respected female teacher or scholar. In the play, Zinari becomes a jaji, dedicating herself to educating women.

Madugu

A trusted leader or guide responsible for organising and leading trading caravans. Hadiru serves as a madugu.

Mahr

A marriage gift that, in Islamic tradition, a husband gives directly to his wife. It belongs to the wife.

Nafaqah

In Islamic tradition, the financial responsibility of a husband to provide food, clothing and housing for his wife.

Nana Asma'u

A renowned nineteenth-century scholar, poet and educator from the Sokoto Caliphate. She is remembered for expanding education, particularly for women.

Orisha

Divine beings or spiritual forces in Yoruba belief. Different Orisha are associated with different aspects of nature and human life.

Qur'an

The holy book of Islam.

Saruniya

A Hausa title often translated as queen or high priestess. In the play, Nafisa is referred to as Saruniya because of her spiritual authority.

Sharia

Islamic law, based on the Qur'an and other religious sources. The play explores how different characters interpret and apply Sharia in different ways.

Sokoto Caliphate

A powerful West African state founded in 1804 by Usman dan Fodio. It became a major centre of learning, trade and Islamic scholarship before its conquest by the British in 1903.

Suya

A delicious popular West African dish made from grilled, spiced meat.

Usman dan Fodio

The Islamic scholar, teacher and reformer who founded the Sokoto Caliphate in 1804.

Yoruba

One of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa, with a rich history, language and cultural traditions. Yusuf speaks Yoruba and introduces aspects of Yoruba spirituality in the play.

Zakat

One of the Five Pillars of Islam. Zakat is a form of charitable giving intended to support those in need.

Language Matters: Some words in this glossary have many meanings and different interpretations depending on historical, religious and cultural context. The definitions here are designed to support your understanding of *Once Upon a Time in Sokoto* and are not intended to be complete explanations.

TASK 3: After the Curtain Call: First Impressions

Activity Type: Writing/Discussion

Suggested age: Key Stage 3 and 4

Subject links: Drama, English

Resources: Notebook, phone or any other writing or recording equipment

Duration 15-30 minutes

Prompted First Impressions (5 minutes)

Immediately after the performance, and before discussing the play with anyone else, take five minutes to capture your immediate response.

You might:

write a few notes,

record a voice note on your phone (if your teacher allows),

sketch an image,

or simply list the words that come to mind.

There is no right or wrong response.

Think about:

What image has stayed with you?

What sound, piece of music, or line of dialogue are you still hearing?

What colour, costume or stage picture do you remember?

What emotion are you leaving with?

What surprised, unsettled or moved you?

Don't worry about explaining why yet. Simply capture your first response while it's still fresh.

Bring this material with you to your next class.

Extension Activity (10-20 minutes)

While working independently, you may choose to develop your first response into:

- A short paragraph
- A poem
- A list of images or words
- A quick sketch
- Another visual response

TASK 4: First Response, Second Thoughts

Suggested age: Key Stages 3 and 4

Subject links: Drama, English, History, PSHE/Citizenship

Resources: Students' first-response notes, interactive whiteboard or other display equipment, and access to sound or video clips if available

Duration: 45–50 minutes

Sharing first responses (15 minutes)

Invite students to return to the notes, voice recordings, sketches or word lists they made immediately after the performance.

Ask them to share their responses in pairs, small groups or as a whole class.
Organise their observations under three headings:

What We Saw

What We Heard

What We Felt

Record key words, images and moments on the board.

Encourage students to consider:

Which images or moments appeared across several responses?

Which responses differed significantly?

Which sounds, lines, gestures or design choices stayed with the group?

Did the same moment produce different emotional responses?

What might explain those differences?

Identifying themes and ideas (10–12 minutes)

Ask students to look across the material gathered and identify recurring themes, questions or tensions. These might include memory, power, education, freedom, identity, history, storytelling, belief or belonging.

Discuss:

Which ideas seem most central to the production?

What questions does the production leave with its audience?

Are there tensions or contradictions that remain unresolved?

Which themes emerged through discussion that were not immediately obvious?

Analysing how meaning is created (15–18 minutes)

Move from identifying themes to examining how the production communicated them.

Ask:

How did the actors' movement, gesture, voice or relationships on stage shape meaning?

How did lighting, sound, music, costume or set reinforce or complicate particular ideas?

Were there moments when design or performance communicated something that the dialogue did not?

How did staging influence which characters appeared powerful, vulnerable, isolated or connected?

What evidence from the production supports your interpretation?

Closing response (5 minutes)

Ask students to return to their original response and add a short reflection beginning with one of the following:

Now I Think...

Looking Back...

After Hearing Other Responses...

My First Response Has Changed Because...

Storytelling, Memory & History

How do stories shape the way we understand the past?

Once Upon a Time Sokoto begins by reminding us that what we are about to watch is a story. The actors introduce themselves and their own relationships to Nigeria before stepping into character. This makes us aware that history is never completely neutral, it is remembered, interpreted and retold by people.

Throughout the play, the storytellers invite us to think about our own role as listeners. Every time we hear, repeat or question a story, we become part of how that story continues.

Oral traditions

Before the widespread use of written records, many communities across West Africa passed on knowledge through oral tradition. Histories, family stories, religious teachings, values and customs were shared through conversation, storytelling, poetry, music and performance. Elders played an important role in preserving and passing on this knowledge from one generation to the next.

In the world of Once Upon a Time in Sokoto, news often travels by word of mouth. Messages are carried by travellers, families and communities rather than through newspapers or the internet. This means that memory, trust and storytelling become powerful ways of preserving history.

Memory and identity

The play also asks us to think about how memory shapes identity. Throughout Once Upon a Time, characters come to understand themselves through stories told by others. Nafisa's understanding of her mother's past and of the Bori tradition is shaped through conversations with those who remember it-people such as Sarkin Gandu and the cage fighter, whose memories preserve histories that might otherwise have been lost.

At the same time, Zanari's understanding of history is shaped by different memories and traditions inherited by her father. Her account of the rise of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Fulani Jihad presents these events as moments of religious reform and political transformation that brought order and new opportunities for many communities.

These are not simply different stories-they are different perspectives on the same historical landscape. Each character's understanding of the past shapes how they see themselves, their communities and their place in the world.

The play reminds us that history is often experienced differently depending on where we stand. Places names and identities change over time. Wars, political change, migration and shifts in power affect how people understand themselves and where they belong.

The play asks us to consider:

Whose memories become history?

What happens when different people remember the same event differently?

Can more than one version of the past be true?

How do different memories shape the way characters understand identity, belonging and justice?

As the play suggests, history is not simply a collection of facts. It is also made up of stories, memories and perspectives.

TASK 5: Mapping Memory

Suggested age: Key Stages 3 and 4

Subject links: History, English, Drama, PSHE/Citizenship

Resources: Notebook or recording device, access to books, newspapers, archives or the internet, paper and pens

Duration: 45–55 minutes in class, with a short preparatory task completed at home

Optional creative writing extension: 35–45 minutes, including sharing

Preparing at home

Ask students to interview someone in their family or community to tell them about an event they remember clearly.

This might be:

- A First Day at School
- Moving Home
- Starting a New Job
- A Birth, Wedding or Family Celebration
- A Journey or Migration
- A Sporting or Cultural Event
- A Local or National Event
- A Moment of Political or Social Change

With their permission, you may take notes or make a short voice recording. You may also bring in materials connected to the memory, such as:

- A Photograph
- A Voice Recording
- A Letter or Written Document

A Newspaper Cutting

A Ticket, Programme or Receipt

Another Object or Piece of Evidence That Helps Support or Complicate the Story

Ask your chosen person:

What happened?

Where were you?

Who was with you?

What do you remember most clearly?

How did you feel at the time?

Why has this memory stayed with you?

What else was happening locally, nationally or internationally?

And anything else that might seem relevant to their story.

IN CLASS - Researching the wider moment (15–20 minutes)

Find out what else was happening in the town, country or wider world at the same time.

This could include:

An International Football Tournament, Such as the World Cup

A Presidential or General Election

A Song Reaching Number One

The Invention or Popularisation of a New Technology, Such as the Mobile Phone or the Internet

The Turn of the Millennium

A Major National Celebration or Public Event

A Significant Local Event or Change

Students may gather these materials in advance or locate during the research activity, depending on the resources available. These should help locate the memory in time. These might include photographs, news reports, music, advertisements, maps, official records, archive material or other sources.

You should consider:

Would the person you interviewed have known about these events at the time?

Did the wider event affect their life directly or indirectly?

How might someone living somewhere completely different remember that same year?

How might age, identity, culture or location shape what seemed important?

Why do some events become part of public history while others remain personal or private?

Creating a memory map (15 minutes)

Create a simple timeline that places the personal memory alongside one or two wider historical or cultural events.

Include:

- The Date or Approximate Year
- The Personal or Family Memory
- One or Two Wider Events
- Any Photographs, Recordings, Documents or Other Evidence
- A Short Explanation of the Connection Between the Events
- One Question That Remains Unanswered

Sharing and discussion (15–20 minutes)

Share the memory map in pairs or small groups.

Discuss with your group or partner:

What did you learn that you did not already know?

Which parts of the account from memory and which came from research?

Did any evidence support, complicate or contradict the account?

Were some details missing from written or official records?

Does the absence of a written record make a memory more or less valuable?

How might someone else remember the same year differently?

Who decides which experiences become part of history?

Creative writing extension (25–30 minutes)

Using the memory map, write a short fictionalised first-person account based on the person you interviewed.

The account should weave together:

The Personal Memory

Details From the Wider Historical Moment

Sensory Details

What the Person Knew at the Time

What They Could Not Yet Have Known

Any Evidence That Supports, Complicates or Contradicts the Story

Students may present the piece as:

- A Diary Entry
- A Letter
- A Monologue
- A Video Diary
- A Recorded Voice Note
- A Short Prose Piece

Sharing the work (10–15 minutes)

Create a small classroom gallery or listening station. Students may display the writing, record it as audio, or film it as a short video diary.

Invite the class to consider:

Which details came from research, and which were imagined?

How did the historical context change the personal story?

What did the creative form allow the writer to explore that a timeline could not?

Did the piece support, complicate or challenge the original memory?

Power, Freedom & Justice

Throughout *Once Upon a Time in Sokoto*, different characters understand power, freedom and justice in very different ways. The play asks us to consider whether these ideas belong to individuals, or whether they are shaped by the communities and societies we live in.

Power

Power can come in many forms. It might come from wealth, education, religion, tradition, family, gender or political influence.

Zinari inherits her father's business and becomes one of the most successful traders in the Sokoto Caliphate. Yet her authority is constantly challenged because she is a woman. Although she has economic power, she still has to navigate a society where religious leaders and social expectations limit what she is able to do.

Hadiru experiences a different kind of struggle. Although he gains status through his marriage and his growing political influence, his mother's history as an enslaved woman means that others question whether he truly belongs amongst the noblemen whose respect he seeks.

Nafisa begins the play with almost no recognised power at all. As an enslaved Hausa woman whose Bori faith is viewed as inferior, she occupies the margins of society. Yet she gradually discovers another kind of power through her knowledge, resilience and refusal to accept the place others have chosen for her.

Freedom

The play suggests that freedom means different things to different people.

For Zinari, freedom is the ability to lead her business, educate women and shape her own future.

For Nafisa, freedom begins with buying her own liberty and refusing to let others define who she is. Even after gaining her freedom, however, she continues to carry the memory of slavery, symbolised by the cowry necklace she wears.

The play reminds us that freedom is not simply about whether someone is legally free. It also asks whether people are able to live according to their own beliefs, identities and values.

Justice

Justice also depends on perspective.

Within the Sokoto Caliphate, laws, customs and religious courts provide ways of resolving disputes. These systems are not experienced equally by everyone, but they offer recognised ways of seeking justice.

As British colonial rule expands, those systems are increasingly ignored or replaced. New laws and new forms of authority are imposed without the consent of the people already living there. The play asks what happens when one system of justice is replaced by another through force.

Things to Consider:

How does each character understand power?

Who has power, and who is denied it?

Can someone be powerful in one area of life but powerless in another?

What does freedom mean to Zinari? What does it mean to Nafisa?

Does the play suggest that justice is the same for everyone?

TASK 6: Playing for Power

Suggested age: Key Stages 3 and 4

Subject links: Drama

Resources: Open classroom space; chairs or a large piece of paper and some pens

Duration: 60–70 minutes; depending on group size

Power Introduction (10–12 minutes)

Sat in a circle, begin with a brief whole-class conversation. Ask students to suggest:

- A person who has power
- A job associated with power
- A place where power is held
- An institution that has power
- An object that might symbolise power

Their responses might include a headteacher, police officer, parent, judge, government building, school, court, prison, passport, uniform or microphone.

As students respond, group their ideas under three headings on three different sheets of paper:

Power in People Power in Places Power in Institutions

Then move the conversation towards how power is recognised. Ask:

How can you tell someone has power?

Does power come from a role, a uniform, money, knowledge, physical strength or the Ability to Make Decisions?

Can Someone Appear Powerful Without Speaking?

Can a Place Make Someone Feel Powerful or powerless?

Can an Institution Hold Power Even When No Single Person Is Present?

Can Someone Have Power in One Situation and very little in another?

When does power become dominance or control?

Can power be shared?

Prisoner and Guard (10–15 minutes)

Arrange the chairs in a circle. Most chairs should have one seated prisoner and one standing guard behind them. Leave one chair empty, with a guard standing behind it

The seated students are the prisoners. The standing students are the guards.

The guard behind the empty chair tries to attract one of the prisoners by making eye contact and winking at them.

When a prisoner is winked at, they must try to leave their chair and move to the empty one. Their guard must try to stop them by lightly tapping them on the shoulder before they escape. Once the prisoner has moved clear of the chair, they are safe and take the empty seat.

The guard who has lost their prisoner now has the empty chair and becomes the person trying to attract someone else.

After a few rounds, swap roles so that everyone experiences being both prisoner and guard.

Safety and access

- Guards should use only a light tap on the shoulder.
- There should be no grabbing, pushing or blocking.
- Students should move at a controlled pace.
- A non-contact version can be used, with the guard calling the prisoner's name before they fully leave the chair.

Reflection (5 minutes)

Where did power sit in the game?

Did the prisoner have any power?

How did eye contact and attention affect what happened?

What did it feel like to be watched?

What changed when you moved from prisoner to guard?

Was the guard's power absolute, or could it be challenged?

How might this connect to the ways power was shown in the production?

Building tableaux of power (12–15 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of five.

Using ideas generated during the opening discussion, ask each group to create five still images, or tableaux, showing:

- One person exercising power, with four responding
- Two people exercising power, with three responding
- Three people exercising power, with two responding
- Four people exercising power, with one responding
- All five sharing or negotiating power

Encourage students to decide what kind of power each tableau represents.

Power might be:

<i>Protective</i>	<i>Controlling</i>	<i>Persuasive</i>	<i>Threatening</i>	<i>Institutional</i>
<i>Physical</i>	<i>Social</i>	<i>Hidden</i>	<i>Fragile</i>	<i>Resisted</i>
	<i>Used for good</i>	<i>Abused or used to harm</i>		

They may draw on the people, jobs, places, institutions or objects identified earlier.

Ask them to consider:

Is the power obvious or concealed?

Is someone actively taking power, or has it been given to them?

Are the others obeying, resisting, supporting or ignoring that power?

Is the group embodying a particular person, situation, institution or feeling?

How can posture, gesture, eye line, height, distance and use of space communicate the quality of the power?

Does the power appear secure, or could it shift at any moment?

Encourage students to experiment with:

<i>Height</i>	<i>Eye Line</i>	<i>Distance</i>	<i>Gesture</i>	<i>Stance</i>	<i>Physical</i>
<i>Contact</i>					
<i>Use of Chairs</i>	<i>Use of Space</i>		<i>Isolation</i>	<i>Stillness</i>	
<i>Movement</i>					

Once the group has decided what kind of power each tableau represents, experiment with how that power can be made visible through the body and use of space.

Building the montage (8–10 minutes)

Groups connect their five tableaux into one continuous sequence.

They should find clear transitions between each tableau and decide:

- How the balance of power changes
- Who initiates each transition
- Whether the change is sudden or gradual
- Whether sound, breath or a repeated gesture will link the images
- How the final tableau of shared power differs from the first

The finished montage should last approximately one to two minutes.

Sharing and discussion (10–15 minutes)

Invite groups to perform their sequences.

After each one, discuss:

- How could you tell who held power?
- Which physical choices were most effective?
- Did power appear to shift smoothly or through conflict?
- Was shared power easy to represent?

Did any tableau suggest hidden or concealed power?

How did the sequence connect to the use of power in the production?

Education & Knowledge

What counts as knowledge? Who gets to learn?

Throughout *Once Upon a Time*, knowledge is shown in many different forms. The play asks us to think about who has access to learning, whose knowledge is valued, and who decides what counts as education.

Zinari

Zinari inherits her father's business and is taught to become a trader, negotiator and leader. Her education is practical and economic. She understands commerce, diplomacy and the responsibilities of leadership because these skills have been passed down to her.

She also believes that women should have access to education and imagines a future in which women can learn more freely.

Nafisa

Nafisa's education is very different. Throughout the play she learns through lived experience. She learns to read and write, but she also learns to heal, to fight, to survive and to participate in Bori ritual. Each of these becomes a different kind of knowledge.

Her journey reminds us that literacy is only one way of becoming educated. Knowledge can also come through culture, spirituality, apprenticeship, observation and experience.

Different ways of knowing

The play does not suggest that one form of knowledge is more valuable than another. Instead, it invites us to consider how different communities value different kinds of learning.

Within the world of the play, some religious leaders interpret the Quran in ways that challenge women's access to learning and authority. At the same time, the play also presents knowledge held within Bori traditions, oral storytelling and practical experience as important sources of wisdom.

As British colonial rule expands, new systems of education and administration begin to replace existing ones. The play asks us to consider what happens when one system of knowledge is treated as more valuable than another.

TASK 7: What Counts as Knowledge

Suggested age: Key Stages 3 and 4

Subject links: Drama, English, History, PSHE/Citizenship

Resources: Sticky notes, pens, large sheets of paper or board space

Duration: 50–60 minutes

Introducing different kinds of knowledge (8–10 minutes)

Write the following four headings on separate areas of the board:

Learned in school *Learned outside school* *Valued in school* *Valued elsewhere*

Read out a selection of activities and forms of knowledge, such as:

- riding a bike
- swimming
- playing a sport
- singing
- taking a good photograph
- speaking another language
- cooking
- caring for a younger child
- navigating a familiar area
- reading another person's mood
- repairing or making something

performing on stage

writing an essay

solving an equation

remembering historical information

understanding how to use a camera

knowing how to grow food

recognising changes in weather

Ask students where they think each example belongs. Some may sit under more than one heading. Encourage disagreement and discussion rather than treating the categories as fixed.

Adding students' own examples (8–10 minutes)

Give each student several sticky notes.

Ask them to write one activity, skill or form of knowledge on each note. These might include things they know themselves, things they have seen others do, or kinds of expertise they think are often overlooked.

Students place their sticky notes beneath the headings they think fit best. If an example belongs under more than one heading, students may write it on more than one sticky note or place it between headings.

Whole-class discussion (10 minutes)

Look at the completed board and discuss:

Which examples appear in more than one place?

Which forms of knowledge are valued differently inside and outside school?

Who decides what counts as knowledge?

Is knowing something the same as being able to explain it?

Can your body know something before you can put it into words?

Can someone understand the theory of something without being able to do it?

Can someone do something very well without being able to explain how?

Investigating how knowledge works (12–15 minutes)

In small groups, students choose two or three examples from the board. For each one, they discuss:

Where does this knowledge sit: in the body, memory, language, ideas, relationships, place or experience? How is it learned?

Who teaches it?

Is it taught directly, or learned through observation, repetition, practice or trial and error?

How do you know when someone has become good at it?

Who judges their competence?

Is it measured through a test, qualification, result, performance, trust, reputation or experience?

Does the knowledge change when it moves from one setting or person to another?

Groups record their responses and feed back one interesting comparison to the class.

Looking backwards and forwards (10–12 minutes)

Return to the whole group and ask:

Why are some forms of knowledge given more status than others?

What kinds of knowledge were considered important in the past?

What kinds of knowledge may become more important in the future?

Which kinds of knowledge are hardest to measure?

What knowledge depends on place, culture or community?

What might be lost when education mainly values what can be tested?

Is there knowledge learned outside school that you wish education valued more?

Is there knowledge learned in school that you wish society valued or used more?

Closing reflection (5 minutes)

Ask students to complete one of the following:

One kind of knowledge I think is undervalued is...

One thing school cannot easily test is...

Something I understand differently now is...

Knowledge becomes valuable when...

In the future, people may need to know how to...

Then & Now

How does history continue to shape the present?

Once Upon a Time in Sokoto is set during the nineteenth century, at the height of the Sokoto Caliphate. At that time, the country we now know as Nigeria did not yet exist.

Following the British conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate and the decisions made at the Berlin Conference (1884–85), British colonial rule expanded across the region. In 1914, the British amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates to create modern-day Nigeria, bringing together hundreds of communities with different languages, political traditions, religious practices and histories under a single colonial administration.

Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, but independence did not erase the legacies of colonialism. Questions about governance, identity, representation, religion and belonging continued to shape the country. These tensions contributed to significant moments in Nigeria's modern history, including the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), also known as the Biafra War.

The play reminds us that history does not disappear. The memories, stories, beliefs and struggles inherited by its characters continue to echo through the present. Understanding the history of the Sokoto Caliphate, British colonialism and the creation of modern Nigeria helps us to better understand contemporary conversations about identity, governance, religion and conflict in the region. History encourages us to ask not only what happened, but also:

Why did it happen?

Whose interests were served?

Whose histories have been remembered, and whose have been forgotten?

How do events from more than a century ago continue to shape people's lives today?

TASK 8: Building an Archive of the Present

Suggested age: Key Stages 3 and 4

Subject links: History, English, Drama, PSHE/Citizenship

Resources: One object per student; photographs of objects where originals are impractical; sticky notes; paper and pens; phones or cameras if permitted

Duration: 60–70 minutes, with preparation at home

Before the lesson

Ask each student to bring one ordinary object that they believe is crucial to understanding what life is like for a young person living in their place today.

Encourage students not to rely automatically on a mobile phone. Instead, ask them to look around their bedroom, home, school bag, kitchen, journey to school or daily routine and identify another material object without which their experience of the present would be harder to recognise.

The object should be safe, inexpensive and easy to transport. Students may bring a photograph if the original is valuable, private or impractical.

Prompts might include:

What object would make your room feel unrecognisable if it disappeared?

What object would make your daily life difficult to explain to someone living one hundred years from now?

What object reveals something about how you communicate, travel, study, eat, dress, relax, worship, care for others or express yourself?

What object says something about money, technology, climate, culture, family, identity or power?

What looks ordinary now but might become historically significant later?

History and the present (8–10 minutes)

Begin with the question:

How do events from more than a century ago continue to shape people's lives today?

Remind students that studying history means asking not only what happened, but also:

Why did it happen?

Whose interests were served?

Who recorded the event?

Whose histories were remembered?

Whose experiences were ignored, erased or forgotten?

How do older systems, decisions and conflicts continue to shape the present?

Connect the discussion to the historical events and ideas explored in the production.

Building the archive (10–12 minutes)

Organise students into small groups and ask them to place their objects together. Introduce the scenario:

A museum in 2126 is trying to understand a group of young people living in your town in 2026.

Students examine the collection and discuss:

What becomes intelligible about this group through these objects?

What do the objects reveal about how these young people live?

What appears important to them?

What can be understood about family, education, technology, money, leisure, identity, culture, community or inequality?

Which experiences are represented?

Which experiences are missing?

What might a future viewer misunderstand?

Students may photograph each object and the complete arrangement if phones are permitted.

Writing museum labels (12–15 minutes)

Each student writes a short museum label for their object. The label should include:

- the name of the object
- its approximate date
- what it was used for
- what it reveals about life for a young person today
- whose experience it helps to make visible
- something a future viewer might misunderstand
- one question the object cannot answer

Encourage students to consider how the language of the label shapes the meaning of the object. Museum descriptions are not neutral: they select, interpret and frame.

Constructing a historical narrative (10–12 minutes)

Groups arrange their objects into an exhibition and give it a title. They create a short introductory text or verbal presentation explaining the account of 2026 that their collection produces. Ask them to consider:

- Which object comes first, and why?*
- Which object appears most important?*
- What connects the objects?*
- What does the collection suggest these young people valued, needed, feared or enjoyed?*
- Is the exhibition telling a story of progress, conflict, survival, inequality, change or loss?*
- Whose perspective shapes the narrative?*

Removing an object (8–10 minutes)

Ask each group to remove one object. To make the consequence less predictable, the teacher may select the object.

What can future viewers still understand about this group?

What becomes harder or impossible to understand?

Which person, identity or experience becomes less visible?

Does the group now appear more uniform than it really was?

Do the young people now seem wealthier, poorer, more connected, more isolated or culturally different?

What assumptions might a future viewer make?

What new and potentially misleading story does the remaining collection tell?

The remaining objects are not necessarily false. The problem is that an incomplete record can still appear complete.

Closing discussion (5–8 minutes)

Discuss:

Can objects tell the truth on their own?

Who decides what is preserved?

Why are some objects considered historically important while others are overlooked?

Which parts of life today are most likely to appear in future histories?

Which parts are most likely to disappear?

How can the loss or removal of one object change the history of a whole group?

What responsibility do historians, museums and storytellers have when constructing accounts of the past?

How might the histories we create now shape the future?

Thank you for using this creative learning resource. We hope it has helped you and your students explore the ideas and creative world of the show.

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