

Noughts & Crosses

Noughts & Crosses tells the story of two young people: a girl called Sephy, and a boy called Callum. Callum is a nought – he's white, from a poor family and lives on a rough estate. Sephy is a Cross – she's black, from a wealthy, powerful family and lives in a grand country house. The story takes place in world very similar to our own, apart from the massive split between noughts and Crosses. Crosses are the ruling class and noughts struggle against prejudice, poverty and low status. It's almost unheard of for a Cross to be friends with a nought, but Sephy and Callum are very close. Even so, Callum sometimes feels Sephy doesn't understand the prejudice he faces. Sephy is frustrated that Callum doesn't realise how hard she tries to understand and that she has her own problems with her cold, snobbish family.

Callum's dad and brother get involved with a nought terrorist organisation. Callum initially hates the violence but after his sister dies and his dad is killed in prison, he turns terrorist too. He hardens himself to the violence but when he is involved in kidnapping Sephy, he realises that he should never have joined the organisation. Despite Sephy and Callum's love for each other, there's no place in their society for a nought and a Cross who want to be together.



Playwright: Malorie Blackman

“Noughts & Crosses wasn’t so much a book I wanted to write as a book I needed to write. It was born of a... need to deal with a number of events from my past, a desire to tackle the subject of racism head on, and the burning anger I felt regarding the death of Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent mishandling of the police inquiry into his death.”

“[Noughts and Crosses] is a game that once you’ve grasped its objectives and tactics, it invariably ends in a draw – a no-win situation. I think that pretty much sums up racism. Ultimately no one wins.”

“I knew I was writing a book that would make some adults very uncomfortable (and it did!) because I was dealing with racism, terrorism, the class system and the artificial divides we always seem to put between ourselves and others. But it was a risk I was willing to take.”



Key Themes

Racism and prejudice

In this world, society is turned on its head. It’s a powerful, wealthy, black ruling class who are discriminating against whites. Crosses with dark skin are seen as the superior race and noughts with light skin are seen as inferior. The theme is explored throughout with a number of key scenes highlighting this theme, e.g. when the noughts go to Heathcroft for the first time. The world of the novel has many close parallels to the civil rights movement in the USA. The atmosphere of the play is permeated by tension because of the way the noughts are treated, e.g. the creation of the of the Liberation Militia (LM), the bombing, etc. To make the racism convincing, there are several incidents and details that have happened in reality, e.g. the colour of plasters.

Identity

In the play (and in reality), individuals are defined by their class and the colour of their skin. Because Callum and Sephy have grown up together and are friends, they can see beyond the labels. As the play progresses, they reject the labels and the prejudices that goes with them and make their own choices, even though there are terrible consequences.

Violent and peaceful protest

The play looks at the ways people respond to situations they believe are wrong. Oppressing the noughts results in terrible consequences, often for innocent people. The bombing of the shopping centre has terrible consequences for not only the victims but the McGregor family as well. The play also makes the audience think about why people turn to violence. Ryan, Jude and Callum join the LM because it’s the only way they can try and make their voices heard. The play doesn’t support violence but it does suggest that people without any political power may feel forced to make themselves heard.

Love and friendship

This is primarily explored through the relationship between Callum and Sephy; their friendship is warm and intense and, in spite of everything, remains strong until the end. Sephy decision to keep the baby and defend how it was conceived highlights the depth of the relationship. It stands as a symbol of hope in a desolate world.

Creative Arts: Drama

Component 3: Set Text Noughts and Crosses

Vocal Skills	Definition
V- Volume	How loudly or quietly you speak to convey a feeling
T - Tone	The expression in your voice e.g. angry tone
A - Accent	The way you pronounce words
P - Pitch	How high or low you voice sounds.
P – Pace	The speed in which you speak
P - Pause	The breaks you take to add tension
E – Emphasis	The importance you put on certain words

Physical Skills	Definition
F – Facial Expression	How you are modifying your face
E – Eye Contact	Where you are looking
M – Movement and Gesture	Any movement or gesture that conveys meaning
P – Posture	The way your hold your shoulders/back
P - Proxemics	The use of space and levels to convey meaning
I - interaction	How the characters behave around each other
G - Gait	The way the character walks

Genre:

Noughts and Crosses is Dystopian with aspects of tragedy.

Dystopian = Imagines worlds or societies where life is extremely bad because of deprivation or oppression or terror, and human society is characterized by human misery, such as squalor, oppression, disease, overcrowding, environmental destruction, or war.

Tragedy = Drama based on human suffering and, mainly, the terrible or sorrowful events that befall a main character.

Key characters	Character Description
Callum	A nought who has a close relationship with his childhood friend Sephy. With the help of a scholarship, Callum can join Sephy's 'Cross' school, which leads to discrimination and bullying.
Sephy	A cross who has a close relationship with her childhood friend Callum. Sephy is naïve to the brutal world around her. However, she learns to sympathise with Callum's suffering.
Jude	Callum's older brother, who displays violent and aggressive tendencies.
Lynette	Lynette is Jude and Callum's older sister. Previously, she experienced trauma that affected her mentally.
Ryan	Callum's father. He does all he can to protect his family.
Meggie	Callum's mother. She was fired as a housekeeper for the Hadley family three years before the play begins
Kamal	Sephy's father. He is a government official who regards crosses as superior to noughts.
Jasmine	Sephy's mother. Her husband's neglect causes Jasmine to feel lonely, insignificant and powerless
Minerva	Sephy's older sister. They frequently disagree with one another.

"You're a Nought and I'm a Cross and there's nowhere for us to be, nowhere for us to go where we'd be left in peace..."



Original Staging

The play was first performed by Pilot Theatre on 1st February, 2019, at Derby Theatre on an end-on stage.

The set, designed by Simon Kenny, created a dystopian reality. A series of panels morphed from walls to apertures to cupboards. This structure was constantly folding and changing. The panels would suddenly transform into banks of video screens or live TV transmissions. The set created a recognisable world but also another, parallel world. Chairs and tables became mirrors. Barricades represented chaos as violence erupted.

The predominant colours were red tones: '...non-natural, lending a brutal, futuristic feel. Red is also the colour of blood and fire and sexuality, and the saturated, claustrophobia of the singular shade heightens the energy in the whole piece'. (Phillip Lowe, East Midlands Theatre online)

Props were simple and naturalistic to suggest both character and location, e.g. a crystal wine glass and decanter, a rucksack used as a school bag, etc.

The set was enhanced by Joshua Pharo's lighting design. He used neon, direct, mood and sectional lighting. This emphasised the structural qualities of the set and reinforced the modern setting. Strobes and haze were used to create atmosphere and location. Infrared was the dominant colour. Projections of news footage gave the play an authenticity and immediacy.

The sound and music had a cinematic feel and worked in conjunction with the lighting to conjure up locations and atmosphere, e.g. a secluded seashore and the terrorist atrocity.

Costume was naturalistic and gave the production a contemporary feel, reflecting the age and status of the characters. The colour used in the Crosses' costumes were 'bright and jewel-like in their wealthy fabrics; the noughts faded and wrung out'. The colour scheme of the set was echoed in the uniforms for Heathcroft School and the Liberation Militia.

Further Support:

Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbFqHDyXo-o&feature=youtu.be>

Video 2 : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsMwXeF7K8o>

Video 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfLWccy_55Y&feature=youtu.be

Video 4: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5I0tPbRYKNG>

Article: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/jan/19/sabrina-mahfouz-interview-noughts-and-crosses-emma-watson>

Podcast: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06ykmfw>

Podcast: <https://player.fm/series/british-theatre-guide-podcast/new-consortium-for-theatre-for-young-people-stages-blackmans-noughts-and-crosses>

The structure of the play

The structure of Noughts & Crosses is known as story theatre; characters stand back and comment on the action as well as take part. They share their thoughts and feelings, comment on events, provide transitional information from one episode to another and help to cover the expository material handled in the play's narrative.

Story theatre tends to use very little set and few props, which are carefully selected and designed. This way, action can proceed quickly without elaborate set changes.

Story theatre is highly episodic. The action takes place in a variety of places during many scenes. Each episode gives the audience an insight into characters and events that have played a significant part in Sephy and Callum's relationship and the society they are part of.

The episodic structure allows different perspectives to be viewed by the audience, e.g. Sephy and Callum's family life and their relationships within the family. The structure is also linear. Although the play begins with a flashback and there are flashbacks in Act 2 to suggest the passing of time, generally the play follows the story of Sephy and Callum from beginning to end.

Key Command Words:

Describe: Tell me what you see or do

Explain: Tell me why you did it or why they did it

Analyse: Breakdown into its fundamental parts and explore them in depth.

Evaluate: Tell me how it could be improved or what was good about it.

