

The Colour of Justice



Author	Richard Norton-Taylor
Published by	Oberon, London
Published in	1999
Price	€9.99
Genre	Verbatim play
Length	98 pages
Summary	<p><i>The Colour of Justice</i> is a verbatim play, i.e. it is entirely based on authentic material. Like all of Norton-Taylor's so-called 'tribunal plays', the play entirely relies on the transcripts of a public inquiry. It investigates the failure of the Metropolitan Police to convict the murderers of Stephen Lawrence, a 17-year-old black teenager who was stabbed to death in an unprovoked, racially motivated attack in south London in 1993.</p> <p>In the play, several lawyers interrogate several police officers, the victim's parents and other witnesses who were present at the scene of the crime on the events of the night and the following police investigations. The play accumulates evidence of the police's mishandling of the case, their inappropriate behaviour towards the parents of the victim and the almost obvious guilt of the five suspects. Thus, it slowly reveals the level of incompetence and corruption as well as a form of unconscious, covert racism labelled 'institutional racism' when the report of the inquiry was published, which marked the investigations of the case by the Metropolitan Police.</p> <p>At the end of the play, chairman Macpherson concludes that mistakes were made that need to be worked on and asks for a minute of silence to remember Stephen Lawrence.</p>

HS Teachable Plays

Prof. Dr. Christoph Reinfandt

Structure	<p>The play consists of nineteen scenes, with an interval halfway through the tenth scene. Chairman Macpherson's opening and closing statement frame the play and function as prologue and epilogue. Due to the similar structure of a trial and the classic form of drama, the play has a clear beginning, middle and an ending. The first scene is based on the transcripts of the inquiry from 25 March 1998; the last scene relies on the records from 1 July 1998. The accumulation of evidence for the police's incompetence, corruption and their covert racist attitudes constitute the part of rising action leading to the climax, which is reached when one of the suspects, Neil Acourt, shockingly proves his involvement in the case.</p>
Characters	<p>The cast can be split in two: lawyers and witnesses. In total, there are eleven lawyers representing all parties involved in the case, who are opposed by the nineteen witnesses equally representing all parties. The witnesses are the police officers in charge of the investigations of the murder, the witnesses, who were present at the scene of the crime, and Stephen's parents, Doreen and Neville Lawrence. Chairman Macpherson fulfils an important function both as the moderator of the inquiry and from a dramatic point of view.</p> <p>It is often argued that students should be able to identify with one of the characters when reading a play. The characters in <i>The Colour of Justice</i> are generally flat and open characters. This makes identification more difficult for any reader. However, the students might identify with Stephen Lawrence who, even though he is not present as a character, the play and the inquiry are dedicated to. The desire to find out whether the suspects are guilty and why they could not be convicted might stimulate the students' interest in the play.</p>
Topics	<p>Dealing with the issue of racism, which is a topic of current public debate in Britain, the subject matter of the play is relevant to the present day. It makes its readers aware of a particular form of racism, institutional racism, which is certainly worth being explored at educational institutions.</p>
Available Media	<p>The paperback edition of <i>The Colour of Justice</i> contains a short preface by Norton-Taylor, a chronology of events leading to the public inquiry, a map of the scene of crime and the text of the play.</p> <p>BBC2 broadcast a film version of the play: <i>The Colour of Justice</i>. Dir. Nicholas Kent. BBC, 1999. Film.</p>
Helpful Secondary Literature	<p>Cathcart, Brian. "The Case of Steven Lawrence." <i>Granta</i> 59, 1997. 146-186.</p> <p><i>The Guardian's</i> constantly updated collection of articles on the case of Stephen Lawrence: "Stephen Lawrence". <i>The Guardian</i>. Web. 3 Oct 2010.</p>

	<p>A docudrama from the parents' point of view: <i>The Murder of Stephen Lawrence</i>. Dir. Greengrass, Paul. Masterpiece Theatre, 2002.</p> <p>A collection of essays on verbatim theatre, including interviews with Norton-Taylor and playwright Nicolas Kent: Hammond, Will and Dan Steward, eds. <i>Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre</i>. London: Oberon, 2008.</p> <p>On institutional racism and the consequences of the inquiry report: Green, David, ed. <i>Institutional Racism and the Police: Fact or Fiction?</i> Trowbridge: Cromwell, 2000.</p>
Language	<p>Using slang or regional dialects, modern plays are often difficult to understand for students who learn English as a foreign language. Even though the text of the play is a transcript of oral speech, slang or very colloquial expressions are rare. This is due to the setting of the inquiry, which takes place in a courtroom.</p> <p>As to vocabulary, legal terms and words and expressions related to court and criminal proceedings feature strongly in the text. If the teacher introduces the vocabulary beforehand, the students should not encounter major difficulties in reading and understanding the text.</p>
Suitable Age	Year 9 – 12
Can be Treated within a Unit about	The play can easily be embedded in a teaching unit on contemporary political and social issues in Britain. It could possibly follow a unit on Britain as a multiethnic society, focusing on the problem of racism.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without making judgements on the evidence given by the different witnesses, the play provides an accurate version of the inquiry. The interpretation and evaluation of the content is deliberately left to the reader who automatically assumes a kind of 'detective' role. This might both stimulate the student's active reading of the play and lead to interesting and lively classroom discussions, offering the students a forum to articulate their feelings and opinions. • The play is set in a courtroom. Therefore, if the courtroom is projected into the classroom, the students can easily act out scenes of the play or reconstruct the events described by the witnesses, e.g. their version of the sequence of events when the crime was committed. • Students are made familiar with a modern genre of theatre, documentary theatre, which they might not yet have dealt with at school. Operating at the interface between journalism and theatre, verbatim plays use methods of production differing from conventional genres of theatre. A careful examination of these methods comparing them to traditional ones provides the students with important insights into the working mechanisms of both verbatim and other forms of theatre.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Colour of Justice</i> has a well-documented prehistory and aftermath. Numerous newspaper articles and records of newscasts can be accessed online. The students could be given the task to conduct further research on the topic or the teacher could use the material to introduce the topic. Brian Cathcart's article critically documents the case with respects to the murder, the subsequent investigations and the consequences. Besides, Richard Norton-Taylor describes his working method in the 'Editor's Note' preceding the text of the play. He exposes the difficulties he encountered while editing the play. This text could be read and analysed by the students in order to make them understand the step from real life to drama, which is characteristic of verbatim theatre.
Teachability Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Colour of Justice</i> being a verbatim play, its content can be regarded as authentic teaching material. It thus links the teaching of 'Landeskunde' to the teaching of literature. • A further reason for teaching the play is its topicality. Not only in Britain, but also in other parts of the world, people die in racist attacks. Germany has not been spared by similar cases. In 2008, for instance, a young Egyptian woman was stabbed in a courtroom in Dresden. Thus, students are able to relate the case of Stephen Lawrence to cases they are familiar with so that discussions in class can be put in an intercultural perspective.
Teachability Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbatim theatre as an intermediary genre between fact and fiction might confuse the students' idea of theatre. Since the "Lehrplan" does not necessarily leave a lot of freedom, the teacher might want to opt for a different, less "uncommon" genre, which might be more easily accessible for the students. • It is undeniable that the play is not all the time exciting; there certainly are passages, which are not entirely relevant to the outcome and might bore the students. As a compromise, the teacher could extract single scenes and use them in combination with the film version or Cathcart's newspaper article.
Overall Evaluation	<p>Richard Norton-Taylor's verbatim play <i>The Colour of Justice</i> is a play which treats a particular form of a widely discussed and current political topic: institutional racism. The tribunal play provides a compressed and accessible version of the public inquiry of the case of Stephen Lawrence and thus serves to disseminate knowledge on this current political issue, which affects not only Britain but is a universal phenomenon.</p> <p>For the students, the play is made accessible by its relatively easy language and by the openness of both the characters and the content of the play. Since a lot of secondary material on the topic is available, the play can easily be integrated in a teaching unit on Britain as a</p>

	<p>multiethnic society. Many classroom activities are possible, which allow the students to engage in lively discussions on one of the many facets of the topic.</p>
--	--

	<p>Overall, although the genre of verbatim theatre might be unusual and partly confusing for the students and despite some long-drawn-out passages, the play can be considered an enrichment for English classes at German schools – whether it is treated in its complete form or only fragmentary.</p>
--	--