

GCSE (9–1)

Teacher Guide

# ENGLISH LITERATURE

Leave Taking  
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**RUNNYMEDE**

**Lit in colour**

# Lit in Colour

## Lit in Colour partnership

OCR is a named partner for the Lit in Colour project. Lit in Colour was created by Penguin Books UK and [The Runnymede Trust](#), to support UK schools to make the teaching and learning of English literature more inclusive of writers of colour. The campaign published research in 2021 which investigated the barriers to inclusivity schools in England currently face.

Our involvement provides us with additional expertise and support as we diversify our own Literature qualifications.

The research led nature of this work gives us access to a comprehensive view of what teachers and students might want from us as an awarding body.

Through our work with Lit in Colour, we are able to offer a wider range of high quality learning and teaching resources. Our new GCSE and A Level texts are not just accessible but exciting, challenging and enriching learning opportunities for our teachers and students.

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# Characters and synopsis

**Mai, an obeah woman**

**Enid Matthews, forties**

**Del Matthews, Enid's daughter, eighteen**

**Viv Matthews, Enid's daughter, seventeen**

**Broderick, a family friend, late forties/fifties**

## Scene 1

The play opens in Mai's bedsit. Enid is visiting the obeah woman as she is worried that her sister in Jamaica is lying to her about her mother's illness just to get money from her. Also, Enid has brought her two daughters, Del and Viv, for a reading. Del is completely sceptical about Mai's 'powers' and although Viv is more polite, neither show much interest in the reading, and it soon becomes apparent that Enid is only interested in finding out about Del's personal life and whether she is pregnant. When Mai tells Enid that she can't help her as she is not a doctor, she also offers Del a listening ear if she needs one. Del rejects the offer.

## Scene 2

Preparing for a visit by the pastor and his wife, Enid cleans her living room as Viv does her schoolwork. Enid is clearly proud of her clever daughter studying Shakespeare and refuses her offers of help with the cleaning. They discuss Del and Enid reveals that she knows that she has lost her job in a burger place and didn't come home the previous night. Viv tries to lie for Del but realises there is no point. A family friend, Broderick, arrives and asks Enid to help him with his tie. He and Viv tease Enid about her preparations for the pastor. Broderick reveals his frustration with the way that the British government treats immigrants and questions why he had to pay £50 to get citizenship after living in Britain for 30 years. He also shows he doesn't trust the government to honour it. Enid does not share Brod's longing for Jamaica or his distrust of the British government and expresses happiness and pride that

her daughter will get to university. Brod berates her for not telling her daughters about their Caribbean roots, but Enid dismisses it. When Del gets home, Enid confronts her and Del is forced to admit the truth about losing her job and staying out for the night. She shows resentment towards her mother and expresses her hatred of living with her. Del challenges her mother's rose-tinted view of life in England by referring to her dead-end jobs and the poor treatment she receives. She reminds her mother of an occasion when Enid was told to clear up vomit at the hospital staff Christmas party when she attended as a guest. Enid loses her temper and slaps her.

### Scene 3

As Enid clears up after the visit from the pastor and his wife, she and Brod discuss the evening. Enid is worried because Del and Viv did not attend, and she is afraid of what the pastor may have thought. Brod questions her loyalty to the church, but Enid explains that she only feels listened to by God. Brod has lost his faith and instead drinks to be happy. They reminisce about the past and their experiences of church services in Jamaica and end up dancing. When Viv returns, she takes a call from Jamaica. Enid receives the news that her mother has died and she must send money for her funeral.

### Scene 4

Enid sits in her living room in the dark. Viv comes in and listens as her mother tells her about the harshness of her life in Jamaica. Viv points out that her mother has told her daughters very little about where she is from or about their relatives. Enid talks about her disappointment that she couldn't go to America to be with her uncle but instead had to come to Britain. She also describes her mother's refusal to say goodbye to her when she left Jamaica for England. She begins to tell Viv about her father saving the money for her trip to join him in England but stops when Viv asks what happened to their marriage. Instead, she gives Viv money she has saved up for her to use for university and forces her to accept it.

### Scene 5

A few weeks later, Del has moved in with Mai and is staying in her estranged son's old bedroom. Del is still sceptical about Mai's powers but is impressed when she correctly identifies her dyslexia and difficulty reading. Despite their bickering, they seem close and have reached an understanding. Viv arrives to tell Del that she shouldn't stay with Mai in her pregnant state but Del refuses to go

home. Viv gives her Enid's money and tells Del that she has walked out of her English examination as an act of rebellion because she is sick of doing things to please others. Instead of being impressed, Del is furious and kicks her out telling her to go and take her exam.

### Scene 6

Enid has come for a reading from Mai. She tells Mai that she is worried about Del and doesn't know where she is. She also expresses her guilt about her mother's death. Mai gives her something to help with her stress. After Enid has left, Del comes in and Mai tells her she can't do the work of an obeah woman anymore. She tells Del that she should be with her mother but Del thinks her mother hates her.

### Scene 7

Brod is at Mai's after being kicked out by Enid. He tells Del that Viv has gone to stay with a friend after Enid threw them both out of the house. He explains that Enid has stopped cleaning or cooking since Del left. Brod asks Del about the baby's father, but she says she doesn't want him involved. Brod explains that Del's father was a good husband to Enid until he suffered racial abuse while working at Smithfield meat market. When he refers to him beating Enid, Del tries to stop him and refuses to listen.

### Scene 8

Del is still at Mai's and has been learning her craft. She has cleaned the flat and has started to see Mai's clients. Del seems happy and more content. There is a strong connection between Del and Mai with Del sensing that there is something wrong with Mai's heart. Mai passes her notebook to Del and explains that she does not have her own daughter to pass it to. Enid comes for a reading. Del tells her that she knows about her father's violence towards her. She gives Enid her money back and tells her to send it to Jamaica. Enid expresses how alone she feels but Del refuses to come home. Viv is leaving for university to study Black Studies. Del asks her mother why she doesn't like her, and Enid tries to explain that she had to prepare her for a harsh life of rejection, but she would do anything for her. She reveals her need to be looked after and Del softens as she begins to read her palm.



# Setting

The action takes place in London in the 1980s. There are two settings: Mai's living room in Deptford and Enid's living room in North London.

# Characterisation

## Enid

Now in her forties, Enid arrived in England as a young woman having left her family in Jamaica. After having two daughters, her husband abandoned her, and she brought them up alone. Enid is ferociously hard-working and extremely proud; she accepts her poverty and hard life without complaint. She works as a hospital cleaner and still manages to save money to help Viv at university. She is proud of her life in England and refuses to get drawn into any suggestions that life as an immigrant is challenging or that there are racial tensions. She wants her daughters to succeed and have an easier life than her. She has brought them up to be English and told them very little about their heritage. She is extremely proud of Viv as she is doing A Levels and has the chance to go to university. She worries about Del who left school with no qualifications, worked in a burger bar and is now pregnant. Enid has a fraught relationship with her sister and thinks she lies to her to have money sent back to Jamaica. She learns that her mother has died during the play, and it has a huge impact on her due to their unresolved problems: her mother never accepted her move to England and refused to speak to her. Enid has strong religious values and is desperate to impress the pastor by hiding any signs of tension with her daughters. She consults Mai, an obeah woman, to seek advice about things she worries about. She believes that Mai can use her powers to help resolve issues despite her daughters' scepticism about such practices.

## Mai

Mai is a clairvoyant obeah woman in Deptford who Enid consults to resolve any issues or worries she has about family. Mai offers her clients a holistic approach to healing, and it becomes apparent that she takes the role of a counsellor asking probing questions and forcing Enid to face some uncomfortable truths. She understands



the issues and problems encountered by black women and they approach her rather than visiting a doctor to be given anti-depressants. The character of Mai adds some humour to the play, as she often takes a light touch, acknowledging her own imperfections, as well as celebrating her female empowerment. She is intelligent and resourceful and at times shows sharp insights about the women she encounters. She develops a bond with Del and eventually passes down her secrets and teaches her the craft. In doing so, she is conforming to the tradition of obeahs handing down their powers to a female relative. Mai has one son who is estranged so Del becomes her symbolic daughter.

## Del

Del is Enid's elder daughter. At eighteen, she has left school after struggling due to her dyslexia. She has recently been sacked from her job in a burger bar and has started staying out all night. She is in the early stages of pregnancy but has no interest in involving the father of the baby as she believes that all men are useless with families. Del is vocal about her resentments: she rails at her mother about the limitations of the jobs she can do and her poor treatment as a second-generation immigrant in Britain. Del is convinced that her mother hates her and the issues in their relationship cause her to leave home and move in with Mai when her pregnancy is revealed. Del has been told little about her Caribbean roots or the history of her ancestors so when she first encounters Mai, she is rude and cynical about her role as an obeah woman. As she gets to know her, her interest grows, and it soon becomes apparent that she has the same gift. As a result, she works hard to learn Mai's craft and undergoes many changes. She starts to clean Mai's flat and relieve her of her duties with clients. By the end of the play Mai hands over to her.



## Viv

Viv is Enid's younger daughter. Unlike Del, she excels academically and is sitting her A Levels with university beckoning. At the beginning of the play, she comes across as a peacemaker who tries to mediate between her mother and sister. She is observant and interested in what happens around her. She knows that her mother keeps secrets from her daughters and seeks to find out more about her past. Viv is heavily influenced by the euro-centric school curriculum she has experienced. She quotes from Rupert Brooke and Shakespeare but knows nothing about her real ancestry or history; when Brod questions her about 'Nanny a the Maroons' she says, 'Never heard of her'. When she expresses an interest in visiting Jamaica, she frames it as a 'gap-year' project and volunteering. When Del leaves home, Viv finds it difficult to cope with Enid alone. She has a crisis and walks out of one of her A Level English examinations. She goes to see Del expecting her to celebrate her rebellion, but Del is furious with her pushing her out of the door and telling her to go back and sit it. Eventually we learn that she is going to university to pursue a degree in Black Studies.

## Broderick

Broderick is an old family friend who also emigrated to England from Jamaica. He offers insights into Enid's past life as well as the breakdown of her marriage. Broderick acts as a foil to Enid's dogged determination that life in England is better. He expresses feelings of insecurity about his immigration status despite being forced to pay £50 to register his citizenship. He lacks trust in the British government and fears that in the future they will renege on this, and he will face deportation. Broderick also questions Enid's refusal to teach her daughters about their heritage and roots. Broderick has lost his religious convictions and misses the 'spirit' of church back in Jamaica. Instead, he drinks to numb himself and cope with his life in England and to dream about 'the land a wood and water'.



# Themes

## Mother-daughter relationships / intergenerational conflict

### Enid and Mooma

Enid's troubled relationship with her own mother is revealed through fragments of her memories, as well as her response to updates from her sister, Cynthia, about her mother's state of health. Although Enid keeps most of her emotions hidden, she reveals her guilt about leaving her homeland (especially her mother) throughout the play.

In the opening scene, Enid gives Mai a letter from her sister claiming that her mother is ill and needs money for a doctor. She wants Mai to tell her whether her sister is telling the truth, or whether her sister is lying to get money from her. She reveals that it is five years since her last visit but at that time her mother was healthy: 'If the woman didn't climb tree, pick coconut give me.' She also cites that 'Me gran'mother live til she a hundred and two' as a further reason to distrust her sister's claims that her mother is ill. Mai's pragmatic advice is to send the money anyway, but this is ignored by Enid: something she later regrets.

Enid left Jamaica to escape a life of rural poverty and hard labour for little return. She represses her feelings about leaving her mother until she is informed about her death (via a reverse-charge phone call). Her reaction is denial – that her sister is deceiving her – then to blame herself: 'Then who kill her them? Me?' The effect of her mother's death is profound. Viv finds her sitting in the dark as she thinks about the past – she is uncharacteristically drinking. When Viv tells her not to sit in the dark, her response is revealing: 'I am used to sitting in the dark. You think me mother could afford electricity? Hot an' cold running water? Flush toilet? We shower in waterfall.' She also refers to hunger as 'that roar in your belly day and night...' Enid's mother's method of dealing with life seems to have been escapism: Enid remembers how 'One day Mooma take me on a long walk. I don't know why. Just tek me to places in the district I never know before. Secret places. Many a time you couldn't find Mooma. She must be just sit an' think and dream in them place. Hear Mooma singing...' However, Enid is clearly haunted by her mother's refusal to say goodbye when she left from England: "Mooma," I say, "I gone now." She never turn around, jus' carry on working, chop chop chop, play deaf. In the end I had to give up, walk away. (*Slight pause*) It wasn't easy to leave.' (Scene 4, pages 41-43)

Enid's grip on life declines: she stops cleaning the house and eventually ejects both Viv and Brod. Eventually she returns to Mai and finally lets her emotions surface:

*'Standing, ENID stares straight ahead, then her face contorts and her mouth opens in a painless scream. Then the sound comes – a howl of pain...'*

### Enid and her daughters

Enid has brought her daughters up as a single mother with their father absent from their lives. Viv and Del are young woman on the cusp of independence but that independence is subject to a renegotiation of the mother-daughter relationship. Enid finds it hard to let go and loosen her control on her daughters' lives. She takes Del and Viv to visit Mai at the beginning of the play to find out Del's secrets, including whether she is pregnant. This prompts Del to assert her independence and confront her mother for her interference.

Del and Viv's understanding of Enid is one-dimensional, as they know so little of her past, her feelings, or her motivations. Enid's goal is to give her daughters a better life than hers and she single-mindedly denies the past in an attempt to focus on the future where her girls are English. To achieve this, she deliberately discourages them from any attempts to identify with their cultural roots: 'You come here, you try to fit in. Stick to the rules. England been good to me. I proud a my English girls.' Brod admonishes her for this: 'You teaching these children all wrong. They going forget where they come from. These girls ain't English like them newsreader who got English stamp on them like the letters on a stick a rock, right through English. These girls got Caribbean souls.' (Scene 2, page 29)

Viv's academic success leads to a more positive relationship with her mother, as Enid is clearly proud of her, boasting to Brod about her school report: 'All 'A's. My daughter going to university.' When Enid tells Brod 'She know who she is. Tell him who you are.' Viv stands and recites Rupert Brookes: 'A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware...' At this point in the play, Viv appreciates her mother's sacrifices: 'How can we ever live up to that? We don't deserve it, Brod.'



Del's relationship with Enid is more complex. Due to her dyslexia, Del has not achieved educationally and thinks that Enid hates her. She has been caught shoplifting, fired from her job and is pregnant so knows that she has disappointed her mother. Del resents the way that Enid tries to control their lives and often hits back at her attempts to do so. In Scene 1, she deliberately reveals Enid's fears of her pregnancy to embarrass her in front of Mai. She complains to Viv that 'she thinks we're seven years old' but then acts childish and petulantly in response. She lies to Enid about her job, her friendships and her social life and relies on Viv to support her. Del also rebels against Enid's idealisation of life in England forcing her to confront the truth about their lives in an exchange which becomes physical. Unlike Enid, Del does not think they should 'stick to the rules' and she doesn't feel grateful for the life she leads; on the contrary she feels deeply resentful about 'A greasy job in a greasy café where they treat me like a dum dum and give me a couple of pounds at the end of every week.' She also highlights the realities of life as a second-generation immigrant in London citing 'the police vans hunting us down, or the managers that treat us as the lowest of the low.' The confrontation reaches an ugly climax when she reminds Enid of a staff Christmas party at the hospital where she works as a cleaner during which 'You're all dressed up and you look beautiful...one of the nurses drinks too much and pukes all over the floor...in front of everyone, matron tells you to clean it up...you get a mop and bucket and clean it up.' (Scene 3, page 34)

Towards the end of the play Del reveals to Mai that she thinks Enid 'hates me. Always has, ever since I was a little kid. She thinks I'm bad' and Mai explains that she also had a difficult relationship with her son: 'I was hard on my boy. I didn't hate him. I was trying to save him'. This is further developed by Enid herself at the end of the play when she says to Del 'How you going to teach your children that they don't exist?...You say I don't see how them treat you out there. I see it. I see it and it make me want to tear the place down. I would chop off my hand if it would help you.' (Scene 8, page 72)

Enid believes 'Viv will be all right. They can't take you education away from you', but she worries about 'the bigger one...I worry she go destroy herself'. She's harder on Del because she believes that she will have a harder life than Viv and that she has to prepare her for that.



## Mai and Del

The relationship between Mai and Del develops over the course of the whole play and becomes a symbolic mother / daughter relationship. When Del is taken to Mai's home for a reading in Scene 1 she is rude and insulting about the mess and the smell to the point of coming across as defensive and uncomfortable. She is also completely sceptical of Mai's powers and thinks she is just there to rip Enid off financially. However, right from this point, Mai comes across as sympathetic to Del's situation. She defends her behaviour to Enid when she claims 'She getting outta hand. She don't come home after work' reasonably citing 'So, she go out with she friends. Nothing wrong with that.' She advises Enid to 'leave her to do what she want' having warned her 'People does take advantage if you show them you care too much.' When it is clear that Enid has brought Del to her so she can confirm whether she is pregnant, Mai backs out stating 'Then she come to the wrong place' and refuses to get drawn in. The bond between them begins when Mai offers Del her support: 'Anytime you need someone to talk to, I'm always here.' And persists even when Del dismisses her advice as 'mumbo-jumbo shit', saying 'I can see you need to talk.' Mai's insistence that Del gives her back the charm that she has pilfered ends the scene on a note where Mai has the upper hand and Del is left confused about whether she really does have powers after all.

After the ugly confrontation between Enid and Del, it is Mai who Del turns to. Again, Mai is able to get through Del's defensive exterior which she masks with banter and teasing. When Del teasingly says 'You make it all up, don't you? Come on, I won't tell anyone.' Mai's response is to take her hand and tell her something about herself:

*MAI: You have a liking for books, but when you read words run across the page like black ants. The teachers say you slow, so you give up and run with a crowd who make you feel like you belong...but just recently you had a change of heart.'*  
(Scene 5, page 47)

Although Del tries to hide her surprise at the accuracy of Mai's words, it clearly has a profound effect on her. When Enid comes to Mai in Scene 6 to tell her that Del has run away and she doesn't know where she is, Mai does not reveal that Del is living with her. She offers reassurance 'She will be alright' and listens to Enid tell her about Del's shoplifting, encouraging her to unburden herself about her worries about Del as well as her grief about her mother's death: 'You take all the time you want.' She respects Del's privacy, but when Enid has gone, she is clearly bothered, as she tells Del to leave by Wednesday because 'You should be helping each other to survive. Don't you feel for her?' But Del simply refuses to back down as she is convinced 'She hates me. Always has, ever since I was a little kid. She thinks I'm bad.' Mai reflects on her estranged relationship with her son remembering 'I was hard on my boy. I didn't hate him. I was trying to save him' showing understanding of both perspectives.

Eventually Del finds her purpose through her relationship with Mai, as Mai recognises that Del has the gift and starts to teach her the craft. This enables Del to secure her future financially but also connects her with her past and offers her a sense of belonging for the first time. She cleans the flat and starts to take more responsibility. In the final scene when Mai puts her through 'your exams' it is as though she is correcting Del's past educational failures and showing that she can 'read' – just a different kind of reading. The moment where Del reads Mai's palm and sees her illness is profound and it enables Mai to let Del go out on her own. 'You passed with flying colours. You're a natural' and 'It's time. You ready' precedes Mai handing Del her notebook because 'I don't have a daughter to pass them on to'. That Enid is Del's first reading is significant and begins the process of their healing.



## Cultural identity – belonging and displacement

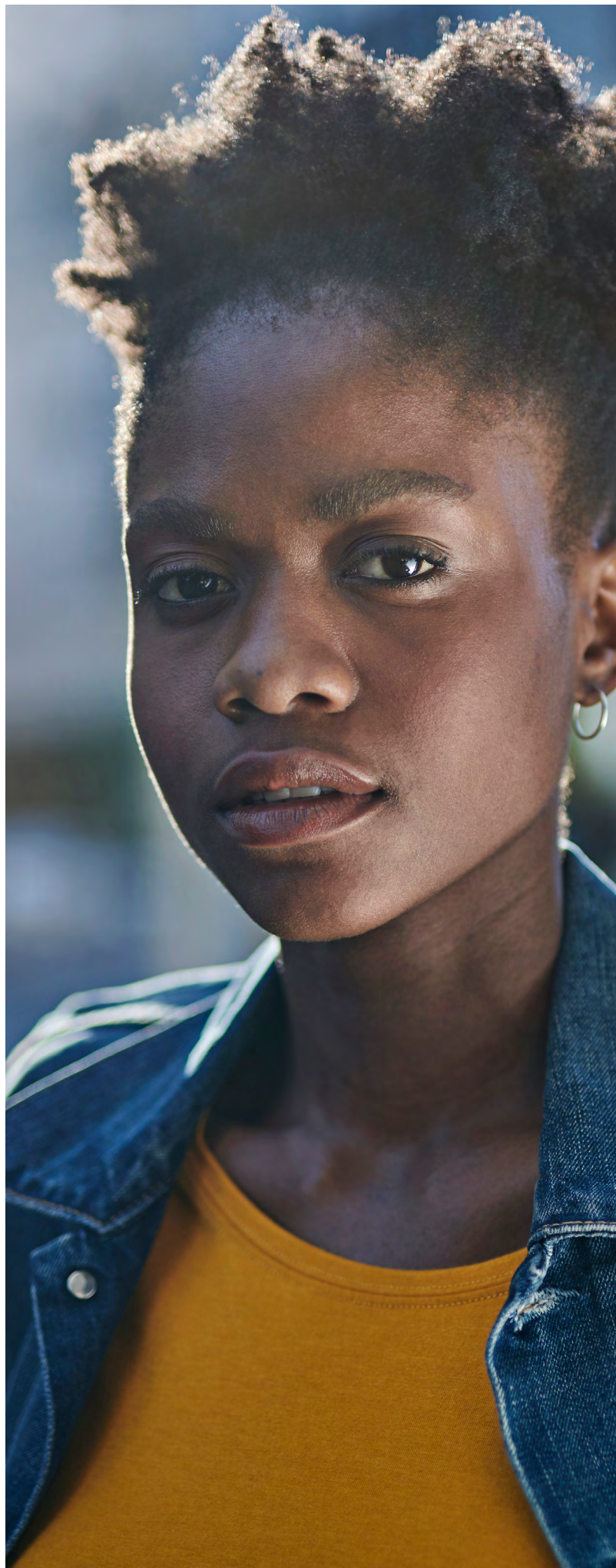
'It not easy to turn you back on one country and start fresh in foreign. It mash up you life.' (Mai: Scene 6, page 56)

Torn between two worlds – her Jamaican past and her present life in Britain – Enid experiences a sense of separation from her mother country and a lack of belonging in Britain as a first-generation immigrant. Her daughters' experiences are different as second-generation immigrants born in the UK. Their experiences and values are distinct from their mother's, and this creates a barrier in their relationships. The distinction is palpable from the older characters' thick West Indian accents and dialect when compared to the two girls' London accents.

The play explores the theme of dislocation through Enid as she clings on to her old life through her visits to Mai, her religious beliefs, and her old values, yet also struggles to create an identity in her new home. Despite her insistence that she is proud of being in England, she is still emotionally bound up in Jamaica where her mother and family are, yet also must navigate her way in Britain, her physical home. Her life in Jamaica was as part of a poor rural community and that poverty is still a source of shame for her. She doesn't share much about her past with her daughters, but when grieving for her mother, confides in Viv: 'I come from the dirt. I come from the poorest family in the whole a Jamaica. People used to laugh at us, pick on us.' Her aim has always been to protect her daughters from such shame by working 'two jobs a week' to ensure they can 'dress like those children who have fathers' and 'People laugh at me, but they never laugh at you'. Later she contemplates the loneliness of struggling in London compared to how they dealt with poverty in Jamaica: 'When I was a girl you kill a cow, you share it up, everybody in the district gets a piece. Here, you poor an' you by you'self. Nobody cares.'

In the play it becomes apparent that to her family back at home, her relative poverty in England is not understood – they expect Enid to send them money and assume she is wealthy. As Brod says, 'People back home think Caledonian Road paved with gold.'

The church is important to Enid's sense of belonging but that is not shared by her daughters. Enid's attempts to please the pastor and her expectations that her daughters will support her drives a wedge between them especially when they do not attend an important evening where she entertains the pastor and his wife.





Viv is alienated from her heritage by a euro-centric English school curriculum. When Brod quizzes Viv about Jamaica's national heroine, 'Nanny a' the Maroons', she knows nothing about it, yet when her mother asks her who she is, she quotes from Rupert Brooke's poem, *The Soldier*: 'A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware...' which suggests her sense of identity is confused and can only be defined through the canon of English literature that she has memorised. It indicates that despite her education, Viv is confused about who she really is. Even her desire to visit Jamaica is framed as a 'gap year' project as a 'volunteer' rather than as a trip to visit family and discover her roots. Viv's response when Enid explains they showered under a waterfall is typically western – 'That sounds amazing' – and she is shocked when Enid says she stole a pair of stockings from her uncle's wife when they visited Jamaica from America.

Later in the play, affected by Del leaving and her mother's withdrawal due to Mooma's death, Viv begins to question the value of her education:

*VIV: Oh, I knew all the answers. Pat me on the head and they all come tumbling out, say exactly what the examiners want to hear. But no matter how hard I search for myself in them books, I'm never there... Things I feel they haven't got words for. I need another language to express myself.*  
(Scene 5, page 53)

Viv has studied a white curriculum where she sees little of herself, but she still behaves in a way that is expected. She has learnt to give the right answers but what she has learnt is separate to her own experiences. She feels lost. This moment in the play also undermines Enid's belief that education leads to freedom and assimilation into British society – her later bemusement at Viv's choice of a degree in Black Studies is palpable – but it is clear that in her choice of degree Viv has found a way of finding 'another language to express' herself and also of seeing herself in the books she studies. Interestingly, it is a compromise through which she can please her mother but also fulfil her own needs. Viv is still a peacemaker despite her rebellion at this point.

Del feels alienated from both her mother's world where you accept the harshness of your life and work hard, and the more aspirational world occupied by Viv where her success in exams means that she can escape poverty through a university education. It is only when she meets Mai, and realises that she has the same gift, that Del begins to discover her place in the world. Her decision to live with Mai and escape home during her pregnancy is to remove herself from Enid's disapproval and desire to keep up appearances for the church.





## Marriage and relationships

In *Leave Taking* there is an absence of men within the family unit. Mai's husband is dead and Enid's husband abandoned her and their daughters, Broderick admits to having left his family, and Del has no interest in involving the father of her baby when she discovers she is pregnant.

This allows the characterisation of Enid as a powerful black woman who does not need a man to navigate her way in the world. From what Mai says in Scene 1 many immigrant women were let down by their husbands:

*MAI: ...Plenty black woman over here does come see me 'bout man... So many a those women lef' lonely on their own... They think I can work miracles.*

*ENID: Me husban' long gone, yes. But I don't want him back. I bring up those two girls on me own. (Scene 1, page 17).*

This is reinforced by Brod's words to Del later when she asks him if he loves her mother: 'After everything we been through it hard to find you have any love left. Your mother say she finished with love.'

Due to Enid's reluctance to discuss the past with her daughters, very little is revealed about their father until later in the play. Following her mother's death, Enid begins to tell Viv something about her father but only focuses on the beginning of their relationship and their shared determination to emigrate:

*ENID: ... We sit by we self and plan through the night...put money down buy him a ticket for the ship to England.... Exactly a year after him leave, I get an airmail letter with a ticket in it. He save every single penny he work to buy that ticket. (Scene 5, page 44)*

When Viv responds by saying 'Hope I find someone to love me like that. What happened to you?' she receives no reply. Later Brod reveals to Del that their father became abusive and violent due to the racism he experienced at work: '...you father change from a smiling boy into a hard man...If they won't treat him like a human being outside, him make sure she treat him like a king in him own house...no one care what he want to do to a black woman.' (Scene 7, page 62)

Being brought up without a father seems to have made Del dismissive of any suggestion that the father of her baby should be involved in its upbringing. Any mention of him is immediately shrugged off without any thought:

BROD: I can look after meself.

DEL: So can I.

BROD: That must be why you looking so well. (Indicates her stomach) The father visit you?

DEL: I don't want him to... (Scene 7, page 61-62)

Later Del adds, 'I'll never be a victim' suggesting that she is avoiding any situation where she could become vulnerable. On the contrary, Del has exerted the power in her relationship with her boyfriend, Roy. She tells Viv 'I'm finished with men' and when asked if she begged him, she replies 'No I did not beg. / What is wrong with you?' adding 'He begged me, actually, but I weren't having none of it.' When told he has since tried to find her by calling at her home. Her response is 'You better not have told him where I am.' (Scene 5, page 51)

Little is revealed about Mai's husband, but when Del comments on the pictures of topless women on Mai's son's bedroom wall, Mai drily says 'He take after my husband' which suggests that her marriage was not a happy one. Mai's presentation as a strong, independent woman is reinforced when Del asks her whether her husband minded 'you doing the obeah' and she replies 'He had no choice.' (Scene 5, page 46)

Brod is also an absent father although he fails to take responsibility for the situation. Early in the play Enid hints at his unfaithfulness in his marriage:

BROD: This pastor must be a very high man. You sure you not in love with him?

ENID: Him have a wife.

BROD: That don't bother some man.

ENID: (*pointed*) No, it doesn't bother some man, does it, Brod? (Scene 2, page 32)

Later when Del asks Brod 'What makes you men allergic to the sound of a baby crying?' he is evasive, full of excuses and blames his wife: 'I didn't run away. Yes, I went wild for a time, when we was all young. I made mistakes but that didn't give her the right to say I couldn't see my kids, take them back to Jamaica. I yearn for them every day. (Scene 7, page 62). His euphemistic language here makes his objections sound hollow and unconvincing.

# Contexts

## Biographical context

Winsome Pinnock outlines the biographical details which inspired her to write *Leave Taking*:

*'My mother migrated from Jamaica to the United Kingdom in 1959, following her husband-to-be who...saved his salary for a whole year before he was able to afford the money to buy a ticket for her passage over. The shock and disappointment of those who migrated to the UK at that time is well documented...*

*My parents' marriage disintegrated a few years later, and my mother became a single parent to four young children at a time when there was still stigma attached to divorce.'*

Learners can explore more around the biographical details that inspired Winsome Pinnock to write *Leave Taking* in this [blog](#).

## Migration to Britain in the 1950s and 60s

Like Enid, most migrants came to Britain in the 1950s and 60s to escape poverty and with hopes of a better, more prosperous future. They came prepared to work hard but with the promise of rewards for their labour. However, most migrants faced disappointment when they realised that Britain was not the promised land that they expected it to be. At the time there was a housing crisis and many ended up in multi-occupancy housing with a single room and shared bathroom and kitchen facilities. Many of the properties were poorly maintained and overcrowded. Ironically the areas where work was available tended to be the ones with the most acute shortages of housing. As well as finding accommodation short of expectations, most migrants were disappointed by the degrading jobs on offer and the poor working conditions they were expected to endure. Black migrants also had to face racial discrimination which often barred them from housing and job opportunities. Signs saying

'No blacks' were common, and where black workers were placed in skilled or supervisory positions it was common for white co-workers to stage protests. As a result, many migrants ended up with jobs that were beneath their skills, experience and qualifications. For women with children, shift work was often the only way they could manage work and their domestic responsibilities. Racial tensions were high despite the fact that white migrants far outnumbered black migrants.

Like Enid, many first-generation black migrants relied on the church to offer them support and a sense of belonging. Through churches they could maintain a strong cultural bond with the countries they had left behind.

For second-generation immigrants in the 1970s and 80s the experience was very different. Their dislocation was bound up in the associations of whiteness with being British. For them, the issues were bound up in identity politics and what it meant to be black and British. Unlike their parents, they did not have the links and associations to their parents' country of origin. In the play, Viv's decision to study Black Studies at university alludes to this struggle. Second generation immigrants still faced issues with discrimination in the job market – this was reflected in the unemployment figures where young black people were more likely to be unemployed than their white counterparts. As a result, there was a period of public unrest in the 1980s where Black and Asian youths rebelled against racial hostility and prejudice. This coincided with the rise of political theatre and later in the 1980s plays written by Black and Asian women, including *Leave Taking*.





## Obeah women

Obeah is defined as ‘a kind of sorcery practised especially in the West Indies’. Obeah women (or men) were believed to have been born with the gift of special powers that were passed down from generation to generation. An obeah woman was considered to be a leading figure – a matriarchal role – and therefore first-generation immigrants from the West Indies continued the practice as a link with the traditions of their homeland when navigating their way in an alien culture.

In the play Mai refers to her notebook and teaches Del the secrets of her craft, but only after she is convinced that Del has the gift. In the context of 1980s London, it soon becomes apparent that Mai acts as a confident and counsellor for women like Enid, offering a sympathetic ear and a holistic approach to solving their troubles. For example, after the death of Mooma when Mai suggests that Enid sees a doctor, Enid replies ‘What doctor know about our illness? Just give you pills to sick you stomach and a doctor certificate. What they know about a black woman’s soul?’ The last sentence is repeated by Mai later when Del asks her if she will seek medical advice for her heart condition. (Scene 6, page 56 & Scene 8, page 68)

Find out more about [Obeah](#).

## Windrush

Although *Leave Taking* predates the Windrush scandal of 2018, Brod’s words in Scene 2 foreshadow later events and vocalise the fear and insecurity of many migrants, as well as their distrust in the British government:

BROD: All my life I think of meself as a British subject...  
Then them send a letter say if me don’t get me nationality paper in order they going to kick me outta the country...  
ENID: So, we pay the fifty pound and now we nationality secure.

BROD: Secure what? Till them change them mind again?  
...(Scene 2, pages 27-28)

The Windrush generation refers to people who arrived in the UK between 1948 and 1971 from Caribbean countries. It refers to the ship *Empire Windrush* which docked in Tilbury on 22 June 1948 bringing workers from the West Indies to fill post-war labour shortages in Great Britain. The Home Office issued no paperwork to the arrivals making it difficult to prove their legal status in future years when immigration laws were changed. Because they came from British colonies, many of the arrivals had wrongly believed they were British citizens. A number of the Windrush generation were wrongly deported leading to an enquiry which found ‘a culture of carelessness’ in the Home Office.

Find out more about the [Windrush generation](#) and the [Windrush scandal](#).

## Discussion point

*‘Kick us out? Where would me and Del go?’ (Viv, Scene 2)*

Here Viv raises a valid point. As a second-generation immigrant in 1980s Britain, she feels secure.

Consider the contemporary deportation of people born in Britain whose citizenship is not valid for one reason or another.

Would someone in Viv’s situation say the same thing now? How might people feel?

How might the contexts be different today compared to the 1980s when *Leave Taking* is set?



## Matriarchy and matrilineage

Both Enid and Mai are the matriarchs of the play. As head of her household, Enid takes on the roles of breadwinner and carer for Del and Viv. Her position here, and determination to remain strong as a single parent, reflects the centrality of women, and of the mother figure, in Caribbean family structures and communities.

Del's refusal to have the father of her child involved with her pregnancy suggests that she too will go on to be head of her own family.

In Caribbean culture, an obeah woman, such as Mai, was considered to be a matriarchal figure. Mai is an enigmatic character who 'comes to have a powerful influence over all of [the other characters]' (Winsome Pinnock, Introduction to the play). As Mai 'don't have a daughter', the symbolic mother/daughter relationship which develops between her and Del enables Mai to pass on her obeah gift through the female line.

## Oral storytelling

In the play, many of Enid and Brod's reflections on their old lives in Jamaica come in the form of telling stories (see Scene 4 in particular). Links could be made here to the Caribbean storytelling traditions which developed under colonial rule as a way of keeping alive beliefs, practices, histories and myths.





# Approaches to teaching *Leave Taking* as a GCSE text

Learners will need a good working knowledge of the whole text to access the GCSE examination questions.

The questions on the modern prose and drama texts are in two parts:

**Part (a)** is worth 20 marks and requires learners to compare a short extract from their taught text to a short extract from an unseen text from the same genre. Assessment objectives AO1, AO2 and AO3 are assessed. Three bullet points are given to help learners structure their response to address all the assessment objectives. The part (a) questions tend to be driven by contextual factors such as relationships and situations faced by the characters. Both extracts also have a brief introduction to help contextualise them. In response to the question, learners should compare the language and structure of both extracts offering short quotations to support the points made.

**Part (b)** is worth 20 marks and requires learners to focus on at least one other moment in the text in response to a question related to part (a). Assessment objectives AO1 and AO2 are assessed. Candidates should offer analysis of language and structure supported by brief quotations.

To prepare for the assessment teachers are advised to study the text closely focusing on characters, relationships, and themes. Looking at key moments in detail with particular focus on language and structure will prepare learners for both part (a) and part (b) questions. Looking at short extracts from texts with similar themes and ideas to prepare for part (a) is also recommended.

Learners should build up a quotation bank sorted by character, relationships, and themes to encourage the use of brief, specific quotations in responses.

It is recommended to teach contextual information as and when it arises in the text to ensure that AO3 is addressed relevantly through exploration of the characters and events in the play.

## Resources

BBC series [Black and British: A Forgotten History](#)

Nick Hern Books have a [podcast of Winsome Pinnock discussing \*Leave Taking\*](#)

Video of the [cast of the Bush Theatre 2018 adaptation discussing the play](#)

Bush Theatre [Meet the writer](#)





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