

Press Release

15 March 2018

Sir Lenny Henry launches *Let's Play*, the National Theatre's new national primary school programme

Sir Lenny Henry today launches *Let's Play*, a major new initiative supporting the development of drama and theatre in primary schools across the country.

Let's Play commissions exciting new plays with songs and music for children aged 4 to 11 to perform. The programme also provides teachers with high quality training and professional development. This is designed to inspire creative learning across the curriculum and to enable the school to involve children in all aspects of planning and creating a theatre production – from performing to designing costumes to operating sound. The National Theatre is aiming to recruit at least 700 schools across the UK to take part in *Let's Play* over the next 3 years.

Sir Lenny Henry, a member of the National Theatre's board of trustees spoke at the launch, "The National Theatre was founded with a mission to educate as well as entertain and many of us working in the arts can remember an experience at school – a theatre visit, an inspiring teacher, meeting a professional artist – as the ignition to their career or enduring passion for the art form. *Let's Play* is the perfect scheme to engage primary school children in the artistic process, it's an essential part of a young person's creative and artistic education."

The Commons Select Committee on Education has reported that SATS (standardised assessment tests) and the pressure on schools to compete in national league tables has led to a narrowing of the curriculum with a focus on English and maths at the expense of the arts. All children are entitled to a broad and balanced curriculum with a rich arts and cultural education.

Speaking at the launch **Lisa Burger**, NT Executive Director said, 'At the National Theatre we believe that all young people wherever they are in the UK should have the chance to see, make and explore theatre as a core part of their education. Let's Play is the National Theatre's commitment to supporting schools across the country and to developing teachers' skills to ensure that the arts, including drama and theatre, remain a vital part of school life. Theatre has the power to transform lives. It connects and empowers children and young people, develops their skills, confidence and curiosity and vitally, drives imagination and empathy.'

Developed by professional theatre artists alongside teachers and senior leaders from primary schools across the country, *Let's Play* is an ambitious creative learning programme designed to transform creativity and theatre-making in schools. Using a programme of Continued Professional Development and Learning for teachers, specially commissioned plays for children at Key Stage 1 and 2 to perform, and extensive learning resources, *Let's Play* inspires learning across the curriculum.

Hill Mead Primary School took part in the pilot of *Let's Play* last year. **Becky Lawrence**, Deputy Head Teacher, spoke at the launch about what the teachers and children had learnt from the programme, "The Let's Play programme has had a huge impact on the children – it has developed their speaking and listening skills, supported their reading and writing skills and their confidence and empathy grew rapidly. The training was exceptional and prepared teachers to deliver the programme with confidence and enthusiasm, and with an improved understanding of teaching through drama."

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation is supporting the programme across the UK. **Catherine Sutton**, Senior Grants Manager from PHF commented "School productions are important occasions in the primary school calendar and a valuable vehicle for pupils' learning. *Let's Play* will enable schools to extend and deepen the opportunities for creative teaching and learning offered by school productions, to build teachers' knowledge and confidence and to develop children's skills and enjoyment of drama and theatre. We're delighted to be supporting this new programme."

The National Theatre's partner for learning is Bank of America Merrill Lynch. **Andrea Sullivan**, international executive, global Environmental, Social and Governance at BofAML, said: "The education programmes which we are supporting are crucial to ensuring that creativity and innovation are fostered in our children from a young age. The bank's support reflects our commitment to partnering with arts institutions to help promote cultural understanding and enrich our local communities."

Let's Play is based on an original idea by Katie Mitchell.

For more information and to sign up your school visit: nationaltheatre.org.uk/letsplay

Let's Play is supported by Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Charlotte and Simon Warshaw.

The Mohn Westlake Foundation supports nationwide Learning programmes for young people.

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Images can be downloaded [here](#).

The National Theatre

At the National Theatre, we make world-class theatre that is entertaining, challenging and inspiring, and we make it for everyone. In 2016-2017, the NT staged 26 productions and gave 2,585 performances at our home on the South Bank. The NT's award-winning programme had a UK paying audience of 1.8 million, 400,000 of which were NT Live audiences.

The work the National Theatre produces appeals to the widest possible audiences with new plays, musicals, re-imagined classics and new work for young audiences. The NT's work is seen in the West End, on tour throughout the UK and internationally, and in collaborations and co-productions with partners across the country. Through NT Live, we broadcast some of the best of British theatre to over 2,500 venues in 60 countries around the world.

Our extensive Learning programme offers talks, events and workshops for people of all ages, and reaches nationwide through programmes such as Connections, our annual festival of new plays for schools and youth theatres. In 2016-2017 there were 196,826 participations through the NT Learning events programme. Over 3,000 schools have signed up to the free streaming service, *On Demand. In Schools*, since its launch in September 2015.

The National Theatre is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

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