



**Lights Up! Library  
Classroom Activities**

***Punch***

By James Graham

Directed by Adam Penford

Based on the book *Right From Wrong* by Jacob Dunne



## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for bringing Manhattan Theatre Club's *Lights Up! Library* initiative into your classroom! We're thrilled to provide you and your students these classroom activities and the performance recording of *Punch* by James Graham.

Our goals for this initiative are:

- To help students better understand themselves and the world through the medium of theatre
- To help develop a knowledgeable, perceptive new audience for the theatre and for the arts in general
- To stimulate participants' imaginations, creativity, and critical thinking skills through engagement with challenging theatre works

The activities are divided into three sections:

- **Preparing Students to View the Play** — activities may include classroom discussion prompts, writing prompts, and theatre games or improvisations
- **Viewing the Play** — including questions for classroom discussion after students watch the performance
- **Follow-Up Activities** — further activities intended to deepen students' personal and intellectual interactions with the play

Additionally, [click here](#) to access supplemental resources which may include links to articles and videos meant to bring further context to this experience.

Our hope is that you will have the time to activate all the activities in this document; however, we understand that time is among the scarcest resources in a classroom. One could maintain a rich experience by engaging in the framing questions, one preparatory activity, post-show questions, and one follow-up exercise. And, of course, please modify these activities — or devise your own — in any way necessary to meet the needs of each student in your classroom.

Some of the activities you'll find on these pages align to the [National Core Arts Standards for Theatre](#), and most will align to—or can be modified to meet—your local benchmarks and standards.



MTC's Learning and Community Engagement is grateful for the work completed by our teaching artist faculty in New York City high school classrooms and community spaces which led to the creation of this classroom activities guide, specifically: Dominic Colón, Elia Monte-Brown, Cándido Tirado, Ashley Thomas, Marilyn Torres, Joe White, Amy Witting.

We hope that this experience will be enriching and educationally beneficial to your students!

## **ABOUT MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB**

**Manhattan Theatre Club** is one of New York's preeminent not-for-profit cultural institutions and a premier destination for both the most talented artists and discerning audiences to return to time and again. We produce seasons of bold, entertaining and thought-provoking new plays and musicals at our Samuel J. Friedman Theatre on Broadway and on our two off-Broadway stages at New York City Center.

For over 50 years, MTC has been acclaimed for identifying, fostering and supporting extraordinary artists at all stages of their careers and for the consistent quality, range and originality of our over 600 premieres, which include nearly 20% of all of the new plays on Broadway since we opened the Friedman in 2003. Much of this work has gone on to be mounted around the country and the world, appearing frequently on annual "most-produced" lists and amounting to a significant contribution to the American theatrical canon. MTC productions have earned 7 Pulitzer Prizes, 31 Tony Awards, 52 Drama Desk Awards, and 49 Obie Awards, amongst many other honors.

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

Manhattan Theatre Club's Broadway premiere production of James Graham's *Punch* opened at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre on September 29, 2025. It was directed by Adam Penford. The cast included Camila Canó-Flaviá, Victoria Clark, Kim Fischer, Will Harrison, Cody Kostro, Piter Marek, Jacob Orr, Sam Robards, Lucy Taylor, and Amber Reaucheane Williams. The scenic and costume designs were by Anna Fleischle; lighting was by Robbie Butler; sound was by Alexandra Faye Braithwaite.

## CHARACTERS

Jacob:	19-29, white male from Nottingham.
Joan:	50s, and the mother of James
Nan:	Jacob's nan
David:	50s, the father of James
Derek:	a college professor
Mum:	Jacob's mum
Wendy:	a probation officer
Raf:	mate from the Meadows
Sam:	Jacob's brother
Clare:	a local girl
Nicola:	charity worker

## SETTING

There are many locations around **Nottingham, England**, from the **Meadows** housing estate to pubs and prison – however they're realized, as we move fluidly through them.

The play jumps in time but takes place largely between 2011 and the present day.



## PREPARING STUDENTS TO VIEW THE PLAY

### **Framing Questions**

Ask students to reflect upon these questions:

- How might one single action alter the course of someone’s individual history? The histories of others?
- How might social factors or the environment of your local community impact the lives of individuals?
- What does accountability mean to you?
- What do you think is involved in something called “restorative justice”?

### **Framing the Experience: Justice and Accountability**

*National Core Arts Standards alignment: TH:Re8.1.I.b., TH:Cn10.1.I.a.*

*“In Restorative Justice, people might think that “the meeting” is the whole thing, like the whole point, and it just happens. But no. It can take months, or even – in Jacob’s case, over two years. And it is meticulously planned, so that we can be sure it’s the right thing for the participants, and that they can be sure.” – Nicola in Punch (Act Two)*

According to the [Restorative Justice Initiative](#), “Restorative Justice is a set of principles and practices rooted in indigenous societies. Restorative justice can be applied both reactively in response to conflict and/or crime, and proactively to strengthen community by fostering communication and empathy.”

Ask students to take 3-4 minutes to write freely about what the word “justice” means to them, using whatever format or style they prefer. Encourage students to reflect on personal experiences or specific examples that illustrate their understanding of justice for a deeper, more meaningful response.

Next, ask them immediately to begin another 3-4 minutes free write focusing on what the word “accountability” means to them, again using whatever format or style they prefer. Prompt students to include any personal experiences to the extent they feel comfortable.

These writings should be retained and remain private as they will be revisited at the end of the unit.

*Learn more about restorative justice through these [supplemental resources](#).*



## **Circle Up**

*National Core Arts Standards alignment: TH:Re8.1.1.b., TH:Cn10.1.1.a.*

*“For the newbies, don’t panic at all the terms and the words. A ‘talking circle’, as you can see is — yes I know it isn’t quite a circle — is a community-building tool that encourages and facilitates... well, talking and listening. Difficult conversations. So when people are in the space, it’s about treating everyone with respect.” – Facilitator in Punch (Act One, Scene One)*

Ask students to form a circle, or some shape resembling a circle depending upon your classroom set up. Ask them to step into the circle if they can relate to each question you ask.

- Have you ever felt like you don’t belong?
- Have you ever had difficulty in school?
- Have you ever had challenges with your parents or caretakers?
- Have you ever done or said something that you wish you could take back?
- Have you ever harmed someone: without meaning to?
- Have you ever taken accountability for an action that hurt someone?
- Have you ever sought forgiveness from someone?
- Have you ever offered someone an apology?
- Have you ever received an apology from someone?
- Have you ever accepted an apology from someone?

Discuss this experience with your class by asking them what it was like reflecting upon their own experiences and what they may have learned about themselves.

## **Conflict Tableau Triptychs**

*National Core Arts Standards alignment: TH:Cr2-III.b., TH:Cr3.1.1.a., TH:Pr4.1.1.a., TH:Pr4.1.1.b., TH:Re7.1.1.a., TH:Re8.1.1.c.*

*A tableau is a frozen pose, a “freeze-frame,” that expresses a theme, idea, or relationship. You can “launch” each tableau by calling out (or having the class call out) “3-2-1 Freeze!”*

Divide students into small groups. Give each group 3-4 minutes to create a tableau where there is a conflict happening in a group. To achieve this, each student group will need to: define the conflicted group (e.g. family members, school club officers, colleagues in the workplace), to select their roles within the group (e.g. parents, children, siblings, or cousins for a group of family members), and to clearly define the conflict the group is experiencing. Students should jot down notes so they remember their decisions.

Next, ask students to take few additional minutes to create a tableau where one character in the same conflicted group take an action that changes everyone in the group forever. Again, students should jot down notes so they can revisit this tableau.



Finally, give students a few more minutes to create a tableau in which the singular character who takes action in the previous tableau and the others make a different choice to prevent the outcome that changes everyone in the group forever. Students should note their choices and positioning.

Next, ask each group to share their tableau with the class. Work one-by-one within each student group. After the first tableau, ask observing students to identify the nature of the group, the individual roles, and the nature of the conflict. Then, move to the second tableau, and ask observing students to reflect upon on who took the action, the nature of the action, and to identify how the group dynamic has shifted since the initial image. Finally, ask students to share their third and final tableau. Observing students should share their insights on how the new, different choice altered the course of these characters' shared history.

Discuss the experience with students after each group shares their tableau triptych.

**Process questions:**

- How did they determine roles and actions?
- What challenges did they face while working together in such a short period of time?
- What felt successful?
- After seeing all other students present their tableaux, what would they consider revising if asked to do the exercise again?

**Thematic questions:**

- For the students portraying the character who took the action in the second tableau, what did it feel like to be in such a heightened state of conflict with the others? How did you perceive your fellow characters perceived you?
- For the students portraying the characters impacted by the action, how did you feel about the character who made the choice? What differences did you observe in your emotional state between the second and third tableaux?

**Scene Writing: Reckless Actions**

*National Core Arts Standards alignment: TH:Cr.1.1.II.c., TH:Cr2-II.b., TH:Cr2-III.b., TH:Cr3.1.I.a., TH:Cr3.1.I.b., TH:Pr.4.1.I.a., TH:Pr4.1.I.b., TH:Pr4.1.II.a., TH:Pr6.1.I.a., TH:Re7.1.I.a., TH:Re8.1.I*

Students may work individually, in pairs, or groups of three. Students will write a brief play in which one character crosses the line and takes a reckless action that risks their relationship with another character. Before drafting the script, students should develop a [Character Profile](#) for each character as well as make decisions to define the history of the two characters' relationship.

Through dialogue, students should: explore what happens because of the reckless action taking place; develop the conflict that arises because of the first character's act; select strong actions undertaken to attempt to atone for the action; and, show whether any healing of the relationship is possible.



Students can work on their plays over the course of a few class periods. If assigning as homework, be sure to implore students that they should view this as a creative assignment and should not utilize large language models to generate the work for them.

To the extent students are comfortable, ask them to cast the two roles in their plays using other students in the class. Work can be shared in the form of a staged reading, script in hand.

After each play is shared, ask observing students to share what lines of dialogue, images, or conflicts resonate with them. At the conclusion of all sharing, ask your playwrights what it was like to hear their words brought to life and how they might revise the work based upon hearing it performed.

### **Writing Activity: A Place that Made Me**

*“The Meadows Housing Estate is this like big old, social experiment ... that basically fucking failed... Basically everything is back to front. The wrong way round. The houses have their backs to the road, facing Each Other across open spaces. And are like stacked at strange, oddball angles with these walkways above, and dark underpasses below. It was designed to create a sense of community, I think, but it just makes everyone feel cut off, from the world.” – Jacob in Punch (Act One, Scene One)*

Ask students to use imagistic language (highlighting the five senses) to describe a place where they are from. Describe the geography, the buildings, the community. Is there something about this place that has shaped you and the community?

Students may share their writing to the extent they feel comfortable. After students share, discuss: In what ways does this place lift you up? When does it not?

## **VIEWING THE PLAY**

You’ll receive a link and password to the performance recording of the play on the first weekday of the semester for which you registered to view the play. The recording may be viewed only during regularly scheduled class time in classrooms or assembly spaces on your campus. Viewing credentials may not be shared with students for individual viewing at home or on social media.

You may wish to assign each student to “track” a character during the performance using a [Character Profile Form](#).



## **Class Discussion**

*National Core Arts Standards alignment: TH:Re7.1-I.a., TH:Re8.1-I.c., TH:Re9.1-I.b, TH:Re9.1-I.c.*

After viewing the play, use these questions to facilitate a class discussion about the theatergoing experience:

- What moments in the production were particularly vivid and powerful?
- What was surprising?
- What was confusing to you?
- What were the pivotal moments?
- Why do you think the playwright wrote this play?

## **Revisiting Justice and Accountability**

*National Core Arts Standards alignment: TH:Re8.1-I.b., TH:Cn10.1-I.a.*

After viewing *Punch* and discussing the production with the class, ask students to take 3-4 minutes to complete a new journal entry focused on the idea of “justice.” Then, repeat the activity with a renewed focus on “accountability.”

Ask students to re-read their initial writings on the topics of justice and accountability. Discuss as a class how their new meditations are similar or different from those composed previously. For students with differences in their thoughts, probe for specificity in why they believe these shifts or evolution in thoughts took place.

## **Drawing Connections**

*National Core Arts Standards alignment: TH:Re7.1-III.a., TH:Re8.1-I.b., TH:Re8.1-II.b, TH:Re8.1-III.b, TH:Re9.1-III.c., TH:Cn10.1-I.a., TH:Cn11.1-I.a.; TH:Cn11.2-I.b.*

*How does this play connect to the world around us?*

Individually or in small groups, ask students to find an article, news feature, interview, or other recent artifact from current events that reflects one of the play’s themes or ideas. Then, have students share and discuss:

- Why is this theme or idea relevant today?
- Have they encountered the theme or idea in other artistic mediums or media?
- Does this new information alter your personal response to the production? If so, how?

*What did we discover?*

Ask each student to identify a topic in the play with which they were previously unfamiliar. The student should gather as much information as they can on this subject and share with the class.



Sources could include articles, news features, videos, interviews, or other relevant artifacts. Guide students through the compilation of research and the structure of sharing as best appropriate for your subject area and curricular goals.

## **FEEDBACK FOR MTC**

We appreciate that you chose to bring Manhattan Theatre Club's production of *Punch* into your classroom, and we hope that your students had a great experience with these activities and the play.

Please complete the *Lights Up! Library* Feedback Form previously provided to you via email so that we can continue to improve this initiative.