



Emanuel School

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Monday 3rd - Friday 28th October

THURSDAY



Hamilton
Miss ER Cairns

In 2015, a talented young Musical Theatre composer from Puerto Rico, Lin-Manuel Miranda dreamed up *Hamilton: An American Musical*. *Hamilton* premiered in New York in a small theatre before moving to the Richard Rodgers Theatre on Broadway. Performances have consistently sold out, turning over millions of dollars at the box office from its first month alone. The musical tells the life story of America's first Treasury Secretary and founding father, Alexander Hamilton. Other key historical figures feature prominently in the musical, including American presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison; young revolutionary fighters Hercules Mulligan, John Laurens, as well as the French aristocrat, the Marquis de Lafayette. Daughters of American General Philip Schuyler, Eliza and Angelica and Peggy feature as well. King George III of England also makes three appearances in the musical to comment on the development of the new nation.

The plot follows Hamilton's rise from humble origins in the West Indies to his role as first Treasury Secretary of the United States. Miranda conceptualised *Hamilton* as a historical retelling with a twist, reclaiming the predominantly white American founding history for the racially diverse American population of the present. A unique facet of Miranda's telling of Alexander Hamilton's life is in his engagement with issues of race, which presents the difference between White and Black and minority ethnic communities in two ways: first, through the casting of mixed heritage Latino and Black performers in the place of White historical figures; and second, through the use of music styles which originate from predominantly Black communities, such as Hip-Hop, R&B and Gospel. The only characters played by White actors – and who perform in what can be classed musically as a 'British' or 'European' styles – are Samuel Seabury and King George III, both of whom are British. This is in contrast to every American character who is played by someone of Black, Latino, or mixed heritage heritage. The antithetical setting of Black against White subverts the expected relationship between historical oppressor and historically oppressed, in which those of a White heritage have historically been privileged in terms of power, authority and agency.



In 'My Shot', the third number in Act I of *Hamilton*, the character John Laurens and the ensemble sing the words 'when are these colonies gonna rise up?'. 'My Shot' is an 'I want' song, where the lead character of a musical sings about their desire for change. The number opens with the lone voice of Alexander Hamilton, with voice parts growing until the song becomes a full ensemble number. These growing voices throughout 'My Shot' – alongside the rhythmic emphasis of the word 'shot' at the beginning of each new phrase, and of the lyrics 'rise up' on the downbeat of each bar in the bridge – announce that Hamilton intends to do much more than merely recounting a history of the American Revolution. The musical serves to encourage those who feel oppressed and discriminated against by 'colonizing' forces to 'rise up', reclaiming their cultural identity from dominant White forces.

I realise that I write this from a privileged position. I am from a White background and have not had to face the discrimination that Black people past and present have faced and do face here in the UK and across the world. However, in my job as a Music teacher I feel passionate about increasing awareness of the diversity of composers, performers, styles and genres of Music that have always been in existence, and only in recent times have come into the limelight. Music can boast a huge number of Black performers and composers, from the Symphony composer the Chevalier de St. George, to Jazz musicians Miles Davis and Bessie Smith, to more contemporary Hip-Hop, R&B and Soul musicians like Stormzy, Beyoncé and Kanye West. *Hamilton* is a reminder that Music belongs to us all, that a range of styles typically associated with different ethnic backgrounds can and should be celebrated by everyone. This Black History Month, as musicians, we should look to be creative about how we ensure it is a discipline which both celebrates individualism and also brings us together.

Crystal LaBeija
William Morgan - Upper Sixth

Crystal LaBeija is known for her key influence in the New York house system. Her frustration with the racism of white queer spaces (well documented in 1968 documentary 'The Queen') and the difficulty of integrating with straight and cisgender people of colour led her to found a new system, prioritising the safety of QTPOC in particular. While ballroom is often referenced (and more recently, commodified) for the aesthetic and athletic skill involved in its art forms, it has always been a means of political commentary; politics was and remains inseparable from everyday life under anti-queer and anti-black oppression. As 'realness' categories reclaim aspects of society that are often unattainable to their participants due to injustice, vocabulary such

as 'banjee' and 'boujee' comments on the cultural differences of New York City that arise from inequality. This political engagement is recorded in the confessional nature of 1990 documentary 'Paris Is Burning'. While society remains violent towards queer and trans people of colour, Crystal's legacy shows that caring for your community can make a lasting positive impact. This does not, however, mean political liberation for the many members of the community who have been lost too soon.

If this has tweaked your interest, I would draw your attention to two important films: 'The Queen' (1968), and 'Paris is Burning' (1990).




Recommended Theatre

Miss Seaton

I once heard that 'theatre was created to tell people the truth about life'. Theatre has the power to shine a light on all human experiences and perspectives and to fundamentally tell us stories that matter. Stories that educate us, hold up a mirror to reflect on our own flawed prejudices, show empathy and inspire us. Theatre continues and will continue to be a source of inclusive 'truth finding'.

To mark Black History Month, the Drama Department at Emanuel have chosen our top 5 plays that tell stories of black history.

<p>Small Island</p> <p>Written by Adrea Levy, adapted by Helen Edmundson and directed by Rufus Norris. Small Island follows three intricately connected stories which trace the tangled history of Jamaica and the UK. This is The Emanuel Drama Department's TOP PICK. No longer on at the National theatre but you can watch this on the school's membership of Drama Online.</p>	<p>Baber Shop Chronicles</p> <p>Written by Inua Ellams and directed by Micah Balfour. Spanning from barber shops in Peckham to Johannesburg and places in between, this play is a though provoking, vibrant and quick-witted piece that examines the lives and candid conversations of African men. No longer showing live but you can watch online with National Theatre at Home.</p>	<p>Blues for an Alabama Sky</p> <p>Play written by Pearl Cleage and directed by Lynette Linton. Following four friends in Harlem in the 1930s where the cultural renaissance saw a burst of creativity in the predominantly African American neighbourhood. When a stranger comes to town the quartet is faced with live-changing consequences. Now showing at the National Theatre (The Lyttelton) until 5th November.</p>
<p>Yellowman</p> <p>By Deal Orlandersmith and directed by Diane Page. A love story between two childhood sweethearts, this powerful play sketches the generational trauma they have surrounding the colour of their skin. It is considered a timely look into the nuances of race. Now showing at the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond until 8th October but will be available to stream from the 11th-14th October.</p>	<p>J'Ouvert</p> <p>Written by Yasmin Joseph and directed by Rebekah Murrell. Set on the streets of Notting Hill Carnival, this play oozes colour and energy. The piece reflects on the Black British experience and sexual politics of Carnival through two best friends determined to preserve tradition. No longer showing live but you can watch it on Iplayer.</p>	

Sickle Cell Disease Isabelle O'Callaghan - Year 11



We all know that racism has been ingrained in our society. But how has racism seeped into the health of people of colour?

Minority ethnic groups are disproportionately affected by certain illnesses and diseases, such as high blood pressure, lung conditions and diabetes. One in particular is sickle cell disease.

Sickle cell disease, an incurable condition, is disproportionally suffered by those of African or Afro-Caribbean heritage. Red blood cells change shape and can block vessels, causing extreme pain and infections. A sickle cell 'crisis' regularly requires hospital treatment. It was known about since the 1950s, after the first migrations from the Caribbean, but has severely lacked funding and research. Many people have only heard about the condition through television programmes like Call the Midwife! For comparison, there are more people with sickle cell disease (14,000) than with cystic fibrosis (10,500), a well-researched condition with multiple treatment paths. It was only in 2005 that screening for sickle cell disease began, and clinical standards for

treatment were implemented in 2008. That was only 14 years ago, 74 years after the Empire Windrush arrived. Though not exclusively affecting black people, the stigma around sickle cell disease was caused by the racism faced by sufferers.

Last year, a new treatment, the first in 20 years, was announced. The drug Crizanlizumab can help reduce crises, also decreasing the amount of hospital admissions by two-fifths and is available on the NHS. Ten specialised sickle cell centres were set up in 2020. This will help prevent health inequality, under the NHS's £1 billion Long Term Plan. A new campaign surrounding sickle cell disease will raise awareness of the world's most common blood condition.

Minority groups have been ignored by the government, dismissed by medical professionals and overlooked by the gatekeepers of medical research funding. This has discouraged many from seeking medical treatment and caused early deaths especially those with diabetes, heart conditions, asthma and sarcoidosis. Why should they trust that this additional funding would treat the problems which exist, or will it be another temporary plaster of disappointment?