



Emanuel School

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

FRIDAY 13TH OCTOBER 2023

THE LETTER: A SHORT FILM Mr J Skinner

As part of this year's Black History Month programme, we have held special preview screenings of a brand-new short period drama that I directed and co-produced. 'The Letter' is set in The Gambia, West Africa in 1945, and tells the story of a young woman who must trek across her country to translate a letter written in English. This letter tells the fate of her fiancé fighting for the British thousands of miles away.

A couple of years ago, I was approached by my former lecturer (Professor Momodou Sallah, De Montfort University) about creating film adaptations of the novels of Gambian author Baaba Sillah. These books explore the period of The Gambia's history between the end of the international slave trade and the country's independence in 1965. I was particularly drawn to 'Dabbali Gi', which tells the story of young Gambian men enlisted by the British Army during the Second World War. The recruitment of Gambian soldiers was often enforced via a quota system with the 36 local chiefs pressured to supply Britain with servicemen. In total, there were 4,450 Gambian recruits, split between two regiments. 2nd Battalion, Gambia Regiment stayed in The Gambia to defend home soil and 1st Battalion, Gambia Regiment (1,350 men) joined others from across the commonwealth to fight for the British in the 'Burma Campaign'.

Our short film is based on one chapter of 'Dabbali Gi', and focuses on Raamata, a young woman who receives a letter that tells the fate of her fiancée Junkun who is one of the men fighting for the British in Burma. This letter is written in English, a language that no one in Raamata's community can read. In that moment, she decides to embark on a two-day trek to the nearest school, to get the letter translated and to find out what has happened to Junkun. We chose to focus on this particular chapter because it highlights the 'colonial disconnect' and the way in which these civilians in Africa were impacted greatly by the Second World War. We felt this was something that we had not seen portrayed often on screen, and we felt compelled to tell this story.

It has been a challenging yet rewarding experience making 'The Letter'. I feel very honoured to have been able to work with Baaba to support his mission to help Gambians better understand their own history, whilst creating a film that can reach audiences internationally. As a white British director/co-producer, it has been crucial for me to work in a sensitive and collaborative way with Baaba throughout the whole process to help ensure cultural authenticity. I definitely see 'The Letter' as being about the troubled shared history of our two countries and I hope that we continue to see these important stories on screen.

If you would like to find out more or would be interested in supporting the distribution of this short film, please visit www.gofundme.com/f/the-letter-a-short-film or contact Mr Skinner.



WHY YOU SHOULD READ... CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE Ms S Routledge

As we celebrate Black History Month, it's essential to recognise the remarkable contributions of black writers who have shaped the literary world. One such influential author is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose novel *Purple Hibiscus* we are proud to teach to some of our Year 11 groups here at Emanuel. Her compelling storytelling and insightful narratives have made her a prominent figure in African and international literature.

Born in Enugu, Nigeria, in 1977, not long after the Nigerian civil war, Adichie grew up in an academic household and lived on campus at the University of Nigeria, as her father was a professor of statistics there. Her writing is charged with the power of these experiences and seeks to explore significant moments in Nigeria's history, such as *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which is set during the Biafran War. Her eloquent prose has earned her numerous awards, including the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Orange Prize for Fiction.

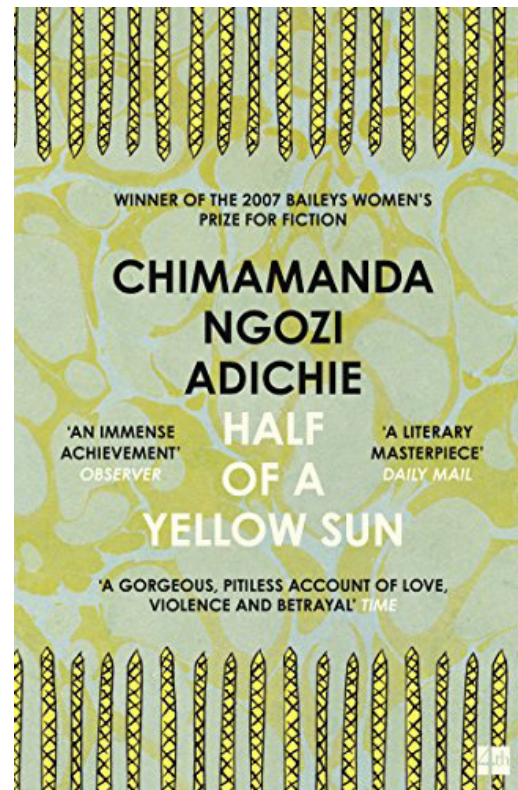
Purple Hibiscus is a captivating novel that offers a poignant exploration of family, religion, and personal freedom in post-colonial Nigeria. The story follows the lives of Kambili and Jaja, two siblings growing up in a wealthy and oppressive household ruled by their strict and abusive father, Eugene.

The novel delves into the stark contrast between their life at home, marked by religious fundamentalism and authoritarianism, and their experiences outside, in particular when they go to stay with their aunt Ifeoma, who shows them a life of cultural and intellectual freedom. Kambili and Jaja's journey toward independence and self-identity is beautifully intertwined with the symbol of the purple hibiscus, representing resilience and the power to flourish even in harsh conditions.

As the siblings navigate the complexities of family loyalty, love, and rebellion, Adichie highlights the broader themes of military power, colonial legacy and the struggle for personal agency. In studying the novel, Year 11 pupils learn about the history of Nigeria, the brutal legacy of colonial rule and the rich culture of the Igbo people. It is a must-read for anyone who is interested in broadening their literary horizons.

If you are interested in Nigerian literature, why not try *Purple Hibiscus* or some of the novels below?

- *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- *The Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi
- *Akata Witch* by Nnedi Okorafor
- *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe



WERE THE SUFFRAGETTES RACIST? Esme (11HLM)

Suffragettes in Britain secured the vote for women over one hundred years ago with the Representation of the People's Act of 1918. On this day around 8.4 million women gained the right to vote. But the perception of groups like the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) focuses almost entirely on the white women leading them like Millicent Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst. Despite this, it's estimated that there were around 20,000 Black British people in the 1900s.

All this begs the question of how black women were treated within the suffrage movement: were the suffragettes racist?

In the US, suffrage movements were rife with racism. Rifts in the suffrage movement began to quickly form after the Civil War, when it became saddeningly obvious that black women and white women had different views on why the right to vote was essential. Black women were fighting for suffrage to empower black communities who up until then were terrorized by boiling tensions catalyzed by recent Emancipation. White women sought equality with their husbands and brothers. When American women finally got the vote in 1920, this primarily benefitted white women. So, black women found themselves shunned and forgotten by the very people they fought alongside.

The suffrage movements in Britain weren't as deeply contaminated with racism as their American counterparts. But the suffragist movement was at its height at the same time the British Empire was at its most powerful, and imperialist views often permeated conversation. In 1911, a group of Indian women were invited to join a suffrage march, however, the real reason for their involvement was merely to demonstrate the size and power of the British Empire. This served to perpetuate the idea that white women in Britain viewed

women from overseas colonies as pawns, tools to gain themselves the vote rather than allies in their shared oppression. This created strain within the British suffrage movements that hindered their progress, because not being viewed as a united front gave members of the public an opportunity to preach the grossly misogynistic stereotypes that women are emotional and unsuited for politics.

So, those who truly deserve recognition are the thousands of invisible black women whose stories and lives were forgotten. After all, their invaluable contribution in fighting for suffrage across the globe was pivotal in shaping the fairer world in which we live today.

