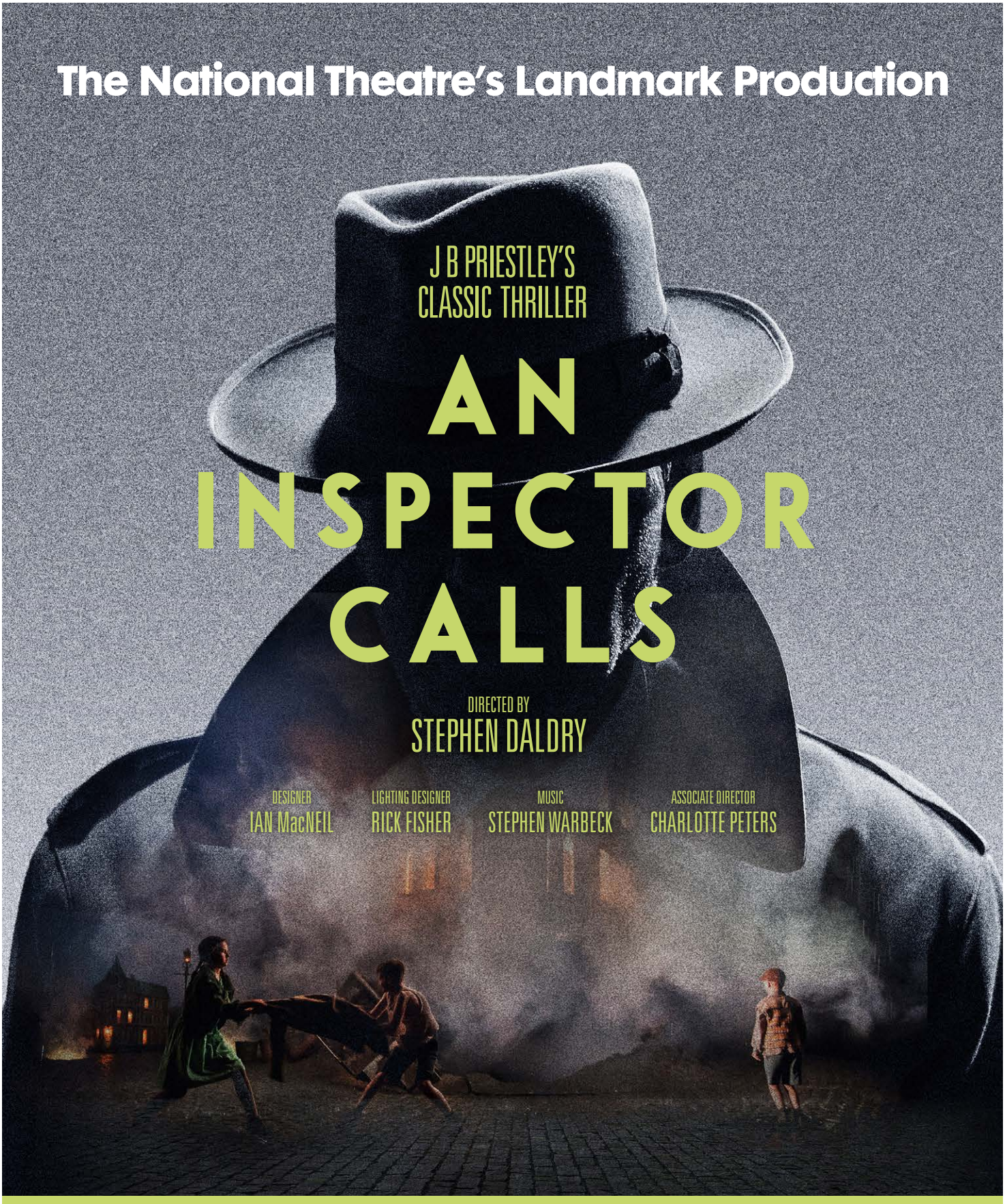
The National Theatre's Landmark Production



Contemporary Educational Resource

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SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS RESOURCE

This resource offers the opportunity for the development of oracy skills in debate, discussion, presentations, use of rhetoric devices and understanding of the social and emotional impact of words.

We offer a range of contemporary complex social situations where an 'Inspector' has been brought in to assess and investigate the alleged corruption and damage, and to understand what the reparation or compensation should be. Some of these situations are contemporary and we have added web links for students so that they can research independently and form their own opinions about what happened and who is accountable. This offers an opportunity for students to consider who is accountable in terms of both the individual and the system (society) that they live in, exploring where the power lies and who enforces that power.

This process mirrors the role of the Inspector in the play who investigates and shows the family how they were accountable for Eva Smith's death. Priestley wants the audience to inspect the social, political and economic issues that their community and society face, to explore this through a social justice lens and to ask challenging questions around power and hierarchy. Also, around how the individual(s) power is held and diminished through social systems, as in the play.

Please use these resources to offer your students critical reflection opportunities that connect to the world of the play and the world we find ourselves in now.

INTRODUCTION

Priestley was a supporter of socialism and his plays promote social responsibility and criticise the problems caused by the class divide.

Priestley offers an opportunity through his play for audiences to understand the impact of a self-centred, capitalistic society on one individual in this 'story'. From this social justice lens Priestley creates the key character of the 'Inspector' and raises questions about personal, family and societal accountability. Who holds actions to account within the play if not the Inspector? The Inspector wants the characters to hold each other to account and challenges the 'blame culture' that exists between them as they try to step back from the scandal. Whilst Sheila is an exception, the rest of the characters are unable to lift themselves beyond their circumstances and consider the wider good or what they might have done to prevent Eva's death. We are challenged to consider what structures and pressures prevent them from helping Eva.

In these resources we will explore contemporary incidents where social accountability was lacking, and with provocation questions for debate we can discuss what, if anything, has changed since Priestley's play. Is it still relevant today? Through this process there will be an opportunity for students to take part in critical reflection and comparative analysis of the play's story against some of the social/political scandals that are outlined in this resource. This will offer a new way of discussing and thinking about the play as well as offering discussion and debating activities to support oracy skills.

On the following pages are examples of recent political and social scandals from which provocation questions will be set.

Watch the Cast Members discuss why it's so important to see An Inspector Calls performed live on stage

WATCH

Watch the Creative Team discuss the importance and relevance of the story of An Inspector Calls

WATCH

SECTION 1.

POLITICAL & SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

POST OFFICE

WHAT IS THE POST OFFICE HORIZON SCANDAL? ALAN BATES

More than 900 sub-postmasters were prosecuted for stealing from the Post Office.

It has been called the UK's most widespread miscarriage of justice.

The Post Office itself took many cases to court, prosecuting 700 people between 1999 and 2015. Another 283 cases were brought by other bodies, including the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

Many sub-postmasters went to prison for false accounting and theft, and many were financially ruined.

In 2017, a group of 555 sub-postmasters took legal action against the Post Office. In 2019, **it agreed to pay them £58m in compensation**, but much of the money went on legal fees.

The Metropolitan Police is investigating the Post Office over potential fraud offences.

Taken from bbc.co.uk/news/business-56718036

SOURCE

BLOOD INFECTION SCANDAL

SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF
INQUIRY CHAIR

British authorities and the country's public health service knowingly exposed tens of thousands of patients to deadly infections through contaminated blood and blood products, and hid the truth about the disaster for decades. An inquiry into the U.K.'s infected blood scandal found an estimated 3,000 people in the United Kingdom are believed to have died and many others were left with lifelong illnesses after receiving blood or blood products tainted with HIV or hepatitis from the 1970s to the early 1990s.

Taken from apnews.com/article/uk-infected-blood-inquiry-report-cc37acdc60798c7af82131efce63b6f1

SOURCE

WINDRUSH

WENDY WILLIAMS
INDEPENDENT REVIEWER

The Windrush scandal began in 2018 concerning people who were wrongly detained, denied legal rights, threatened with deportation and in at least 83 cases, wrongly deported from the UK by the Home Office. Many of those involved were invited to move to the United Kingdom between 1948-1973 to work and help rebuild the country following World War II.

Adapted from lordslibrary.parliament.uk/windrush-scandal-and-compensation-scheme

SOURCE

COVID PARTYGATE

HARRIET HARMAN
CHAIR OF THE PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE

The Privileges Committee investigated whether Boris Johnson may have misled Parliament in statements that he made in the Commons about alleged breaches of lockdown rules in Downing Street and, if so, whether this may have constituted a contempt of Parliament.

Verdict: Repeated contempt of Parliament and misleading the Commons

Taken from instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/privileges-committee-investigation-boris-johnson

SOURCE

GRENFELL DISASTER

SIR MARTIN-MOORE BRICK

Grenfell Tower is a 24-storey residential tower block in North Kensington in London, England that was destroyed in a severe fire on 14 June 2017. | **72 people died.** External cladding that was added to the tower during its refurbishment was found to be the cause of the fire.

Adapted from bigissue.com/news/housing/grenfell-tower-fire-anniversary-seven-years-justice-inquiry

SOURCE

FURTHER READING

Grenfell, COVID and Infected Blood families 'have no faith' inquiry recommendations will be properly carried out

Grenfell United

SECTION 2.

PROVOCATION QUESTIONS FOR DEBATE, CRITICAL THINKING AND ORACY

GENDER DIFFERENCES:

The men and women in the play start out as gender stereotypes. A stereotype is a set idea that people have about what someone or something is like, especially an idea that is wrong.

Look at the ways that Priestley explores these gender stereotypes and gradually breaks them down through the play. The men get weaker as the play develops while Sheila becomes stronger. The young women challenge the stereotypes.

Discussion:

- **How have attitudes changed since 1912 when the play is set (the play was written in 1945)?**
- **Are things perfect now?**
- **What has changed for women since then? Think about the Suffragettes, Women's Liberation and #MeToo as examples of change. What other examples are there?**
- **How do different social media influencers keep gender stereotypes alive? Think about misogyny or "perfect" body images and how these still have a negative influence on people.**

Watch the Cast Members and Creative Team discuss the role of women in An Inspector Calls

WATCH

SOCIAL CLASS:

In the early 20th Century, the class system was clearly defined with Working Class, Middle Class and Upper Classes all knowing their place in society. The classes were usually defined by the amount of money a person had. Priestly believed that class shouldn't matter.

Discussion:

- Look at the way the characters in the play speak about the different classes and the language they use. Priestley uses language that presents Eva as more honourable than the middle and upper classes, which would have been unexpected at the time. Do we still view people who are different to us with prejudice?
- Consider the language used by the Birling family to address the Inspector and how this portrays their opinion of his class.
- Look at how language in everyday life, on social media, in the news and on film and TV affects our views of others.
- Think about the Grenfell Tower fire. The people who lived there were from different countries, races and social groups. Would there have been the same attitude to the building if all the people who lived there had been from a more wealthy or influential demographic?

Watch the Cast Members and Creative Team discuss how language is used in An Inspector Calls

WATCH

Watch the Cast Members and Creative Team discuss whether attitudes around Social Class have changed

WATCH

RESPONSIBILITY:

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Inspectors' main focus is social responsibility. Look at the play alongside recent public scandals such as the Post Office Scandal, Windrush, Contaminated Blood, Partygate or the Grenfell Tower fire.

Discussion:

- How do large organisations gloss over their responsibilities? Who gets the blame? Does social class, economic status, race, gender or immigration status impact on this?
- Look at the different ways in which Priestley makes the audience question their social responsibilities and look at taking responsibility for their own actions.
- Agency is about your very own power, your ability to affect the future. It can be about how you self-organise, be proactive, self-reflect and take responsibility for your behaviours and understand its impact on others.
- Who are the people around you who you feel have agency and why?

Watch the Cast Members discuss how personal and social responsibility is presented in An Inspector Calls

WATCH

YOUNG AND OLD – GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES:

Priestley depicts the older generation in the play as stuck in their ways, having traditional views and thinking they know best.

He shows the younger generation as different – they learn that they are responsible for their actions and recognise that their decisions can affect other people.

Discussion:

- **How do we view different generations now? Do we still think that older people are stuck in their ways or do we recognise that everyone is capable of making changes with the ability to learn and develop?**
- **How can we encourage communication and greater understanding between the generations?**

Watch the Cast and Creative Team discuss the generational differences in An Inspector Calls

WATCH



SECTION 3.

THEATRICALITY, STRUCTURE, CLIFFHANGERS AND TWIST ENDING

FORM:

- An Inspector Calls is a play and so it is meant to be seen in performance
- Consider how the events that happened before the action on stage keep the audience guessing
- As it is a morality play, think about how the audience judges the characters and themselves
- Remember that the audience would be trying to work out if any one person was to blame for Eva Smith's death

FURTHER READING

Use of structure in An Inspector Calls - Form, structure and language - AQA - GCSE English Literature Revision - AQA
bbc.co.uk/bitesize

STRUCTURE:

An Inspector Calls is written in three acts. Priestley cleverly structures the acts so that they end on gripping cliff-hangers. There is also a final climax and then a twist at the very end. This use of structure helps to keep the audience gripped and on the edge of their seats.

Watch the Creative Team discuss the three act structure of An Inspector Calls

WATCH

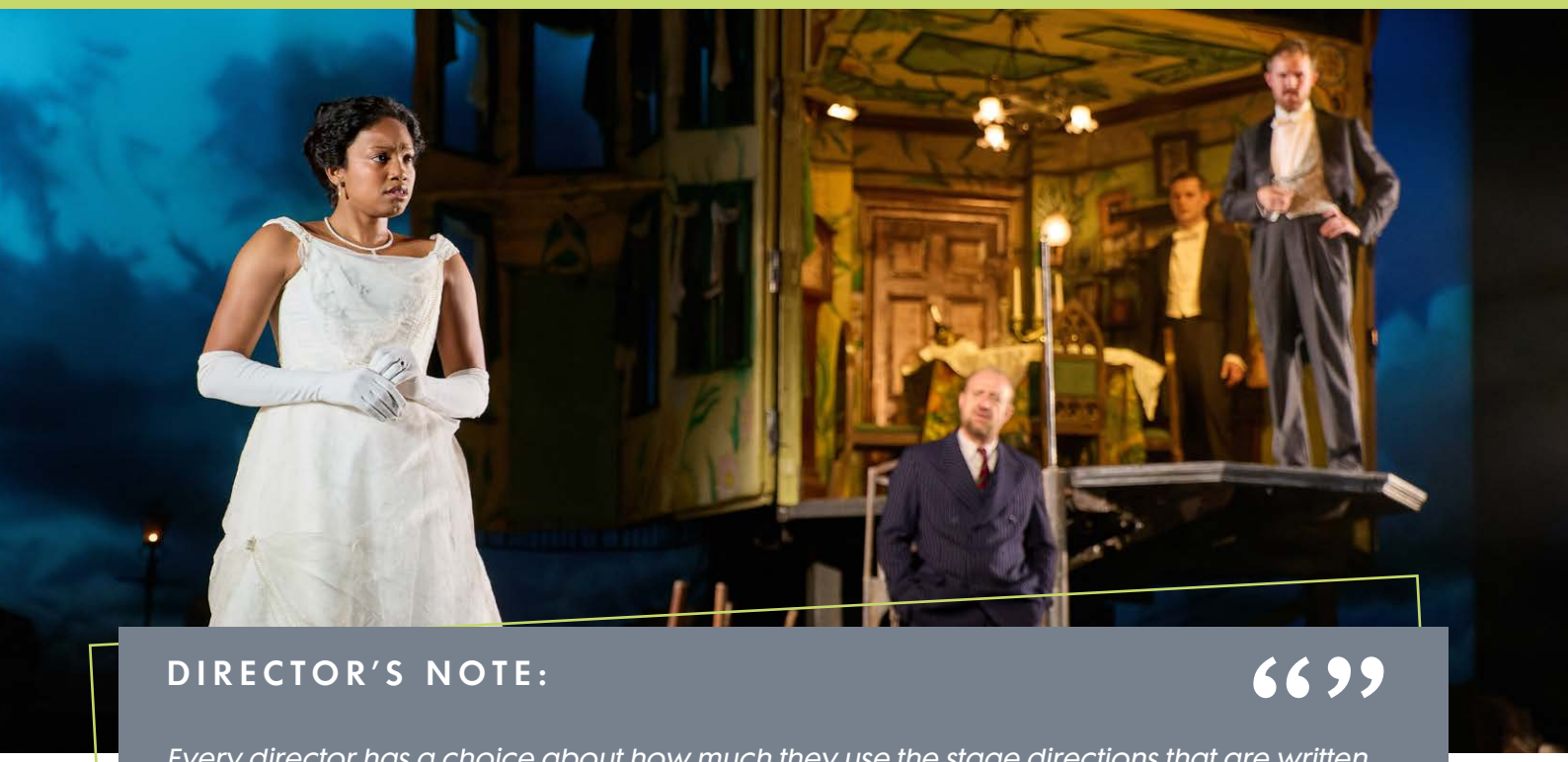
CLIFFHANGERS AND TIMING:

- **Act 1:** The Inspector returns at the end of the scene and asks his question 'Well?' This is a cliff-hanger – the audience want to watch on to see how Gerald and Sheila react.
- **Act 2:** The front door slams, announcing Eric's return, but the audience have to wait until Act 2 for his confession.
- **Act 3:** Ends with the telephone ringing sharply and disturbing the atmosphere that they have restored after the Inspector leaves – this builds up the tension.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

There is no interval in this production of An Inspector Calls and whilst the three acts of the play are referenced, they differ to how Priestley originally wrote them.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

Every director has a choice about how much they use the stage directions that are written in a play. Stephen Daldry did not follow many of Priestley's stage directions. Instead, he made his production more representative of the context and themes that he knew Priestley was passionate about: class and status, the concept of multiple simultaneous timelines, and the idea that privileged people should be responsible for those who are less fortunate, thus creating more community within society. One of the ways that Stephen Daldry achieved this was by creating an elevated sense of drama, stakes, and tension within the production, all of which can be seen in the ways the act changes are presented.

Stage Directions and Setting

Priestley uses stage directions to set the scene and give us information about the Birling family before we even see them. The setting suggests that the Birlings are a comfortable and well – off middle to upper class family. We can also tell that they are all feeling relaxed and confident at the beginning of the play:

Set – large suburban house furniture – 'solid... but not cosy and homelike'

Props – suggests wealth 'champagne glasses', 'decanter of port'

Costume – 'evening dress of the period' white tie and tails – a formal occasion

Lighting – 'pink and intimate'

theenglishnotebook.co.uk

TWIST ENDING:

Birling: *That was the police. A girl has just died - on her way to the Infirmary - after swallowing some disinfectant. And a police inspector is on his way here - to ask some - questions.*

[As they stare guiltily and dumbfounded, the curtain falls]

This is a very effective ending. The Birlings and Gerald are stunned, especially Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald who just a minute ago had been sure they were in the clear. The audience would be shocked and left with lots of unanswered questions.

The ending also reflects Priestley's interest in theories about time, including the idea that individuals re-enter their lives again after death, living it all over again. They can make changes to their previous actions, beginning a new cycle where they do not repeat the mistakes of their past. We can see this in the structure of the play as the cycle of events is about to start all over again, with an investigation into the suicide of a young girl. Sheila and Eric have learned from their mistakes and could escape this cycle, whereas the others have not.

Watch the Creative Team discuss the theme of time within An Inspector Calls

WATCH

Watch the Creative Team discuss how they bring the Director's vision of An Inspector Calls to life

WATCH

DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

The production ends with the same text as Priestley wrote but adds to the drama with the return of the community, filling up the Birlings' house to enact their revenge, whilst Sheila and Edna effectively leave the play, walking under the falling curtain to exit through the audience in search of a new world.

FURTHER READING

Use of structure in An Inspector Calls - Form, structure and language - AQA - GCSE English Literature Revision - AQA

bbc.co.uk/bitesize

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

If you are interested in the Grand Theatre's 'Drama for Oracy Training (©Blackpool Grand Theatre - October 2024) or our 'Story-Led Resilience Training' (©Blackpool Grand Theatre 2019) please get in touch with **celinew@blackpoolgrand.co.uk**

THE GRAND THEATRE | BLACKPOOL

PW PRODUCTIONS

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