



Resource Pack

**BRIXTON
HOUSE**

**HIGH
TIDE**

MERCURY

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Plot Summary

The show begins with Samia and Farook in Pop Heaven, a fantasy broadcast version of the music TV show they present. They decide to tell the story of their rise to fame.

Farook recounts his audition in 2004 for Tolo TV's music show VOX in Kabul, Afghanistan. He flashbacks to his first broadcast of the show while Samia excitedly observes, and they do the dance routine to Britney Spears' Baby One More Time. Samia plays a caller, Nazia, who adores Farook. Farook plays Shape of my Heart by the Backstreet Boys.

Samia interrupts him and flashbacks to how she became the co-host of VOX. She worked as a receptionist at Tolo TV when a creepy male colleague approached her and offered her a job. Present-day Samia and Farook discuss their first impressions of each other. They flashback to when Asif, the producer of the show, met with them and introduced Samia as a co-host.

They have their first live broadcast where Farook is impressed by Samia's rebellious song choice, Kiss Kiss by Tarkan. They reflect on their relationship with music. Then, they have their 2nd broadcast. Off-air, they reflect on Asif's reaction - it's clear that he's not happy about their subversive behaviour. They then flashback to a conversation where they shared music and formed a friendship.

Together they reflect on their friendship during the show years. They flashback to Asif worrying about "push back" from society. Following this, the pair flashback to their 3rd live show where they played the "fart game." Asif watches them and they are forced to an ad-break so he can warn them about taking things too far.

Samia and Farook return from their ad-break and continue the show. They play My Heart Will Go On by Celine Dion and discuss Afghanistan's obsession with Titanic. They go off-air and reflect on how their lives have changed because of the show's success: "we're not just famous, we're superstars".



In their 4th live show, Samia reveals her hair live on TV. They flashback to Samia realising this was an unprecedented act for an Afghan woman on TV. Farook reflects that he “shouldn’t have let it slide” and they flashback to a conversation with Asif, where he reprimands Samia. Samia and Farook narrate the implications of their ongoing rebellious behaviour and flashback to a TOLO TV annual party, where guests are drinking alcohol and the executives congratulate the presenters.

On their 5th live show Samia is in Kabul Zoo and asks Farook to stand in for Maqbool the Monkey. Then they remember a summer where they drove around in Farook’s new car (named Jamie Lynn Spears) and were abused by “two bearded men” who call Samia a “slag.”

Samia and Farook have their 6th live show and do a Q&A. Farook breaks this broadcast and asks Samia when she got her first threatening text. They reveal that Farook’s car was stolen and burned, then return to their broadcast and play Hero by Enrique Iglesias. They discuss the song and reveal that they have been instructed by Asif to play fewer songs by women.

They remember when they were ordered to stay inside the studio for their safety when Samia’s younger brother is caught in a Taliban suicide bombing. Present-day Farook reflects on Samia being “the braver one”, and he remembers noticing Asif calling Samia into his office after the show received a threatening package. Samia is certain that the station executives are going to fire her.

They have their 7th show and dance to Macarena by Los Del Rio. Farook regrets his actions and present day Samia reassures him. Farook narrates the public response to their dancing, including the Chief Justice Fazl Hadi Shinwari’s warning and Tolo TV’s public statement disaffiliating with the show.



Farook does their 8th live show, but Samia is not there and he doesn't know where she is. He repeatedly calls her on voicemail then plays Muqabla Muqabla. The song reminds him of being caught in a landmine explosion when he was 9 years old.

On their 9th live show, Farook sends Samia a message through the show for her to get better soon. Samia has been missing for 6 days, and he has received a voicemail of a woman screaming. A Taliban member, Mahmood, calls into the show, and implies that Samia is a "whore" and that they killed her. Buttons by the Pussycat Dolls plays.

Off air, Farook blames Asif. He explains to the audience that Samia was found dead near her home and was raped and shot in the head. Present-day Samia tells her version of what happened. She imagines alternative endings the story could have had if she not been killed.

The show is cancelled, and Farook goes into hiding in the studio. He plays Baby One More Time and sobs.

The play ends in Denmark, where Farook has sought asylum. He has been at a party, where someone played Baby One More Time and everything that happened came flooding back to him. Samia returns onstage and asks him how he is. Farook tells Samia that she was his best friend, and Samia tells him that he was hers too. She sings the chorus of Baby One More Time and Farook leaves.



Interview with the Writer

Writer Waleed Akhtar sat down with Gbolahan Obisesan, Artistic Director of Brixton House to discuss the inspiration behind Kabul Goes Pop! You can watch the full interview [here](#).



Kabul Goes Pop!... Goes Pop
Francesca Hutchinson

Kabul Goes Pop!

Poptastic Playlist

1

I Want It That Way
Backstreet Boys

3:33

2

Şımarık
Tarkan

3:55

3

...Baby One More Time
Britney Spears

3:31

4

Push The Button
Sugababes

3:38

5

Hero
Enrique Iglesias

4:24

6

I'm a Slave 4 U
Britney Spears

3:23

To get you in the mood we've curated a playlist of the most poptastic noughties hits mentioned in the play. Share it with your class to get you ready to watch the performance! Click [here](#) to listen.

Meet the cast & creative team

CAST

Farook – Arian Nik

Samia – Shala Nyx

CREATIVE TEAM

Writer – Waleed Akhtar

Director – Anna Himali Howard

Set, Costume and Graphic Designer –
Shankho Chaudhuri

Sound Designer – Anna Clock

Lighting Designer – Rajiv Pattani

Video Designer – Gino Green

Choreographer – Yami Löfvenberg

Assistant Director – Neetu Singh

Costume Supervisor – Olivia Ward



KS4

Activities

In line with the national curriculum, Kabul Goes Pop: Music Television Afghanistan would be a suitable live theatre production for analysis.

The show would also provide an invaluable resource for students' devised work in its discussion of character, design, story and the challenge of finding appropriate form to reflect content. Please note: Kabul deals with difficult and sensitive subjects and there is a trigger warning attached to the show. However, the piece deals with important and pertinent themes, perfect for PSHE and Citizenship sessions as well as instilling and exploring empathy in our young people.

Kabul also tackles the challenges of researching, presenting and understanding history in an accessible and creative way. The play will provoke students to ask important questions, exercise critical thinking, weigh evidence, sift arguments and develop perspective and judgement. It will offer a valuable source for discussion around historical context and the interrogation of biased sources.

For more information on the show and how we can support your students with their studies, whilst enlivening the curriculum, please contact our Schools Producer
forest.morgan@mercurytheatre.co.uk



Exercise #1: Reflecting on the production

Reflecting on the production

Curriculum links: Drama, Art & Design, Music

Time: 25 minutes

Materials: Flipchart paper and pens

Use this exercise to support your students to respond to work that they have seen onstage. This tool enables students to respond to any live performance that they have seen, be that dance, theatre or film.

Organise the class into groups of 4 or 5 and give each group some pens and a large sheet of paper. Write the name of the production on the whiteboard, then assign each group an area of the production to explore including:

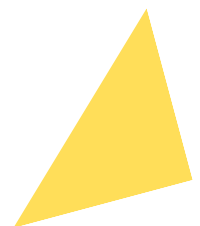
- Directing
- Costume
- Set
- Lighting
- Video and projection
- Music and Sound

Ask each group to write one subject as a header on their large piece of paper. Allow them five minutes to spark swap thoughts and comments around their assigned area of the production, using a spider diagram on their large piece of paper. After five minutes each group must pass their paper onto the next group, repeating this process until each group has commented on all areas of the production listed by the class.

These sheets can then be photocopied and handed out. You could also put the sheets up in the classroom for inspiration when discussing the production.

Things to consider:

- How did the set support the story telling?
- What role did the music/sound score play in the piece?
- How did costume help define character?
- How did costume help define era and place?
- How did the direction support the narrative?
- What role did video projection play in supporting the story?
- How did lighting help to reflect mood?



Historical context

The land that is now Afghanistan has a long history of domination by foreign conquerors and strife among internally warring factions. At the gateway between Asia and Europe, this land was conquered by Darius I of Babylonia circa 500 B.C., and Alexander the Great of Macedonia in 329 B.C., among others.

The 90's was significant and turbulent time in Afghanistan, causing many people to flee for their safety as refugees.

A brief history of the devastating landscape in Afghanistan in the 1990's:

1992

The Mujahadeen and other rebel groups, with the aid of turncoat government troops, storm the capital, Kabul, and oust Najibullah from power. Ahmad Shah Masood, legendary guerrilla leader, leads the troops into the capital. The United Nations offers protection to Najibullah.

1995

Newly formed Islamic militia, the Taliban, rises to power on promises of peace. The Taliban outlaw cultivation of poppies for the opium trade, crack down on crime, and curtail the education and employment of women. Women are required to be fully veiled and are not allowed outside alone. Islamic law is enforced via public executions and amputations. The United States refuses to recognize the authority of the Taliban.

1995-1999

Continuing drought devastates farmers and makes many rural areas uninhabitable. More than 1 million Afghans flee to neighbouring Pakistan, where they languish in squalid refugee camps.

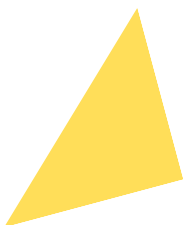
1997

The Taliban publicly executes Najibullah.

Ethnic groups in the north, under Masood's Northern Alliance, and the south, aided in part by Hamid Karzai, continue to battle the Taliban for control of the country.

1998

Following al-Qaida's bombings of two American embassies in Africa, President Clinton orders cruise missile attacks against bin Laden's training camps in Afghanistan. The attacks miss the Saudi and other leaders of the terrorist group.



2000

By now considered an international terrorist, bin Laden is widely believed to be hiding in Afghanistan, where he is cultivating thousands of followers in terrorist training camps. The United States demands that bin Laden be extradited to stand trial for the embassy bombings. The Taliban decline to extradite him. The United Nations punishes Afghanistan with sanctions restricting trade and economic development.

Exercise:

Curriculum links: Drama, History, PSHE & Citizenship

Time: 55 minutes

Materials: Paper & Pens

In our story the play ends in Denmark, where Farook has sought asylum. Kabul explores the rights of refugees. The media plays a significant role in the shaping of perceptions of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the UK. There can be a significant lack of empathy. This exercise asks students to consider what their lives may be like, if they had to leave their home, encouraging empathy and critical thinking.

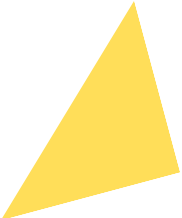
What is a Refugee?

A refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their country because they fear they may be punished or mistreated due to their race, religion, opinions or because of where they are from.

What is an asylum-Seeker?

An asylum seeker is someone who has had to leave their home country to find safety and is waiting to find out if the government will grant them permission to stay.

Did you know...

- Less than 1% of the UK population are asylum seekers and refugees.
 - Asylum seekers cannot work when they arrive in the UK, they are forced to live off £37.75 per week. This money must pay for all their day to day living costs such as food, toiletries, clothes, mobile phone and travel.
 - Asylum seekers do not get a flat when they arrive, they often have to live in hostels and shared houses with lots of other people.
 - 1 person every two seconds is forced to move to a different country because of war and mistreatment in their home country.
 - Over 1/2 of all Refugees in the world are children just like you.
- 

Ask your students to write the following sentence in the middle of their paper:

When leaving a war-torn county, how would you feel? With off shoots of a spider diagram with the words I feel like.....

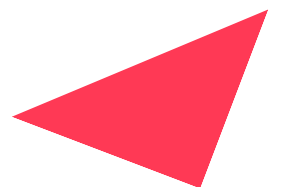
I feel...

I feel...

**IF YOU HAD TO LEAVE
A WAR-TORN
COUNTRY, HOW
WOULD YOU FEEL?**

I feel...

I feel...



**What items would you
bring with you?**

**How does it feel to have
to leave your home, to
escape a war, through
no fault of your own?**

**IMAGINE HAVING TO
LEAVE YOUR HOME,
AND YOUR FRIENDS
AND FAMILY BEHIND**

**What does this new
place smell like, sound
like? Feel like?**

**What will you miss the
most about home?**

Now you have some thoughts and ideas, it's time to get creative.

Write a short 10 - 15 line poem which explores the experience of refugees arriving in a new country. Put yourself in their shoes.

Consider what you can see, what you can hear, what you can smell. What was the journey like? How does it feel to arrive somewhere new and unfamiliar?

We would love to see any work that you create. Feel free to send to our Schools Producer: forest.morgan@mercurytheatre.co.uk

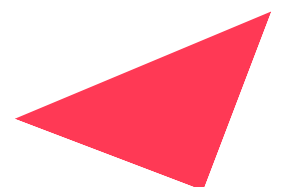
Exercise 2:

As mentioned previously the media plays a significant role in creating fear and negative perceptions of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the UK. It is not always positive.

Ask students to create a newspaper article or news report that portrays refugees in a positive light.

Consider:

- How are refugees portrayed in or represented in the media?
- What impact does this have on society?
- What techniques does a writer use to persuade the reader to agree with their opinion? E.g Facts, persuasive language, images, opinions



Performing history

Curriculum links: Drama, History, PSHE & Citizenship

Time: 55 minutes

Materials: An open space

In Kabul Goes Pop... the characters attempt to tell the story through flashbacks and live broadcasts on their music tv show. The story deals with a significant and difficult time in our history, using pop culture, music of the 90's and shared storytelling.

In small groups, ask the group to pick a significant moment in history.

What were the key moments during this time – and ask the groups to choose 5. Once completed ask the groups to attempt to tell the story of that event through 5 minute scenes in the style of a flashback or using pop culture mediums such as podcasting, an Instagram story or live TV broadcast. What kind of different techniques does each style use?

What 5 songs would you choose to help tell the story and set the time period?

How does that affect the relationship with the audience and the story you are telling?

The treatment of Women

Kabul Goes Pop explores the significant lack of power women have in Afghanistan.

In their 4th live show, Samia reveals her hair live on TV. They flashback to Samia realising this was an unprecedented act for an Afghan woman on TV. Farook reflects that he “shouldn't have let it slide” and they flashback to a conversation with Asif, where he reprimands Samia.

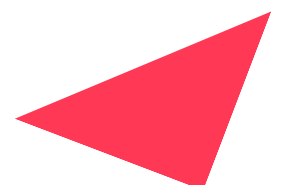
Afghanistan has a tumultuous recent past. In the last three decades, the country has been occupied by communist Soviet troops and US-led international forces, and in the years in between has been ruled by militant groups and the infamous oppressive Islamic Taliban.

Throughout the changing political landscape of Afghanistan in the last fifty years, women's rights have been exploited by different groups for political gain, sometimes being improved but often being abused.

'Afghan women were the ones who lost most from the war and militarisation.'

Horia Mosadiq

Horia Mosadiq was a young girl when Russia invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Now Horia works at Amnesty International as their Afghanistan Researcher. Listen to the audio clip below to hear Horia's overview of thirty years of complex and fraught history, and the impact that occupation and militarisation has had on the women and girls living in Afghanistan.

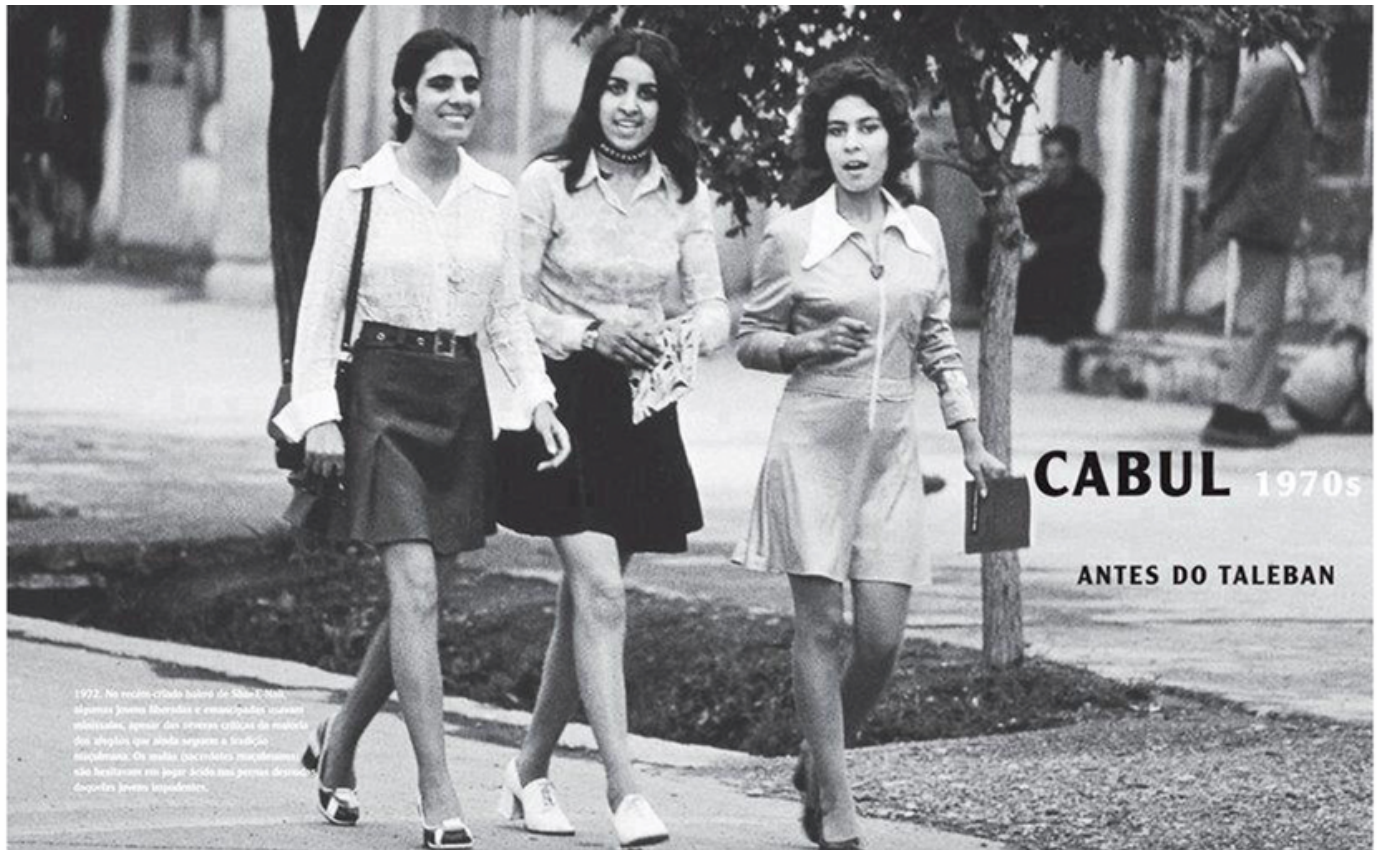


Before the 1979 invasion

Think of women in Afghanistan now, and you'll probably recall pictures in the media of women in full-body burqas. But it hasn't always been this way.

'As a girl, I remember my mother wearing miniskirts and taking us to the cinema. My aunt went to university in Kabul.'

Horia



Until the conflict of the 1970s, the 20th Century had seen relatively steady progression for women's rights in the country. Afghan women were first eligible to vote in 1919 - only a year after women in the UK were given voting rights, and a year before the women in the United States were allowed to vote. In the 1950s purdah (gendered separation) was abolished; in the 1960s a new constitution brought equality to many areas of life, including political participation.

But during coups and Soviet occupation in the 1970s, through civil conflict between Mujahideen groups and government forces in the '80s and '90s, and then under Taliban rule, women in Afghanistan had their rights increasingly rolled back.

Taliban rule in the 1990s: Who are the Taliban?

The Taliban are now notorious for their human rights abuses. The group emerged in 1994 after years of conflict. Many of their members were former Mujahideen fighter who had been trained in Pakistan during Afghanistan's civil war in the '80s and '90s. They came together with the aim of making Afghanistan an Islamic state. The Taliban ruled in Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001.

Denying women human rights

Under the Taliban, women and girls were discriminated against in many ways, for the 'crime' of being born a girl. The Taliban enforced their version of Islamic Sharia law.

Women and girls were:

- Banned from going to school or studying
- Banned from working
- Banned from leaving the house without a male chaperone
- Banned from showing their skin in public
- Banned from accessing healthcare delivered by men (with women forbidden from working, healthcare was virtually inaccessible)
- Banned from being involved in politics or speaking publicly.

There were many other ways their rights were denied to them. Women were essentially invisible in public life, imprisoned in their home. In Kabul, residents were ordered to cover their ground and first-floor windows so women inside could not be seen from the street. If a woman left the house, it was in a full body veil (burqa), accompanied by a male relative: she had no independence.

If she disobeyed these discriminatory laws, punishments were harsh. A woman could be flogged for showing an inch or two of skin under her full-body burqa, beaten for attempting to study, stoned to death if she was found guilty of adultery.

Rape and violence against women and girls was rife. Afghan women were brutalised in the law and in nearly every aspect of their daily life. A woman in Kabul had the end of her thumb cut off for wearing nail varnish, for example, in 1996.

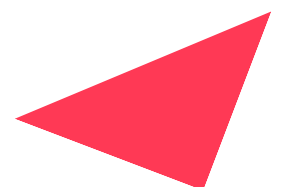
'They shot my father right in front of me. It was nine o'clock at night. They came to our house and told him they had orders to kill him because he allowed me to go to school. The Mujahideen had already stopped me from going to school, but that was not enough. I cannot describe what they did to me after killing my father...'

A fifteen year-old girl in Kabul, 1995

International intervention in 2001

The US led an international military campaign intervening in Afghanistan immediately following the attacks on September 11 2001.

World leaders, including those from the UK and USA, regularly cited the need to improve Afghan women's rights as justification for the intervention.



'There cannot be true peace and recovery in Afghanistan without a restoration of the rights of women.'

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

'The recovery of Afghanistan must entail a restoration of the rights of Afghan women, indeed, it will not be possible without them.'

US Secretary of State Colin Powell

'The conflict will not be the end. We will not walk away, as the outside world has done so many times before.'

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair

The Taliban were ousted from power by the end of 2001.

In the years following international intervention, many schools opened their doors to girls and women went back to work. There was progress towards equality: a new constitution in 2003 enshrined women's rights in it, and in 2009 Afghanistan adopted the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law.

But the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021, and violence and discrimination against women and girls continues - all over Afghanistan. In 2011 it was named 'the most dangerous country' to be a woman.

Now, women are still routinely discriminated against, abused and persecuted. There is lots to be done before the equality of political rhetoric becomes an everyday reality for women in Afghanistan.



'Exercise:

Curriculum links: Drama, History, PSHE & Citizenship

Ask the group to have an open discussion and debate about the treatment of women.

Consider:

- Why is equality important?
- How would they feel if they were banned from going to school or studying?
- Banned from working?
- Banned from leaving the house without a male chaperone?
- Banned from showing their skin in public?
- Banned from accessing healthcare delivered by men (with women forbidden from working, where healthcare was virtually inaccessible?)
- Banned from being involved in politics or speaking publicly?

Exercise: writing a manifesto of hope

Curriculum links: Drama, History, PSHE & Citizenship

Now ask the group to come up with a collective manifesto. Students should work as one large group.

What is a manifesto:

A written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer. A manifesto focuses on helping the poor and stopping violence.

Firstly, allow an open discussion as a group. Ask students to consider what is important to them, what is meaningful to them. Consider the following questions:

- **Do you believe that you can change the world?**
 - **How would you change the world?**
 - **What are the steps you might need to take?**
 - **How would success in changing the world look?**
-
- What are your 5 statements? (How do you want to articulate these- As a list? A lecture? As a poem? As a conversation? In a film? As a song?)
 - How can students share or communicate these alongside simple/ effective visuals? Will they use photographs? Artwork?



2022 Tour

Brixton House: 13 – 29 May

Harlow Playhouse: 8 June

Mercury, Colchester : 15 – 18 June

New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich: 20 June

We hope to see you there!