

# National Theatre

Tuesday 16 September 2025



**National Theatre's schools programme to reach over 1.4 million students across the UK, alongside a groundbreaking new partnership bringing the NT Collection to US schools for free**

**Highlights from today's announcement include:**

- Groundbreaking new partnership with **Educational Theatre Association** brings the best of British theatre to **5,000 US schools across all 50 US states for free** via the National Theatre Collection on Drama Online.
- Seven new plays including recent hits ***The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Ballet Shoes*** and ***Nye*** now available for schools to stream in classrooms on the National Theatre Collection.
- Two national school tours, ***The Last Wild*** in partnership with The Unicorn Theatre, and a nine-week tour of ***Bacchae***, will bring main stage programme directly into schools.
- Thousands of **free tickets for local London school groups** to watch shows at the National Theatre made possible by new partnership with **Mitsubishi Estate London**.
- **New Theatre Trip Toolkit** to help theatres across the UK build schools audiences in partnership with the RSC, Children's Theatre Partnership and Arts Council England.
- Subsidised student tickets and **schools' engagement programme** around nationwide ***Dear England*** tour supported by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will reach over 10,000 young people.

The National Theatre today announces its Autumn programme for schools across the UK, deepening its work with young people to support its continued ambition to reach every child in the UK before they leave school. Over 90% of state secondary schools are already signed up to access the National Theatre Collection to stream world-leading theatre directly in their classrooms.

Expected to reach **over 1.4 million students** across the UK over the next year, this varied programme of national tours, participatory activity, expert toolkits and digital resources aims to break down barriers to access to the arts in schools and ensure that young people nationwide, many experiencing theatre for the first time, can engage with world-class drama as they learn.

### **Widening global access to high quality theatre through the National Theatre Collection**

Over the past year, the National Theatre Collection's global reach amassed over 6.7 million total pupil views across over 7,500 education institutions in 62 countries, making world-class theatre more accessible than ever.

In a major step forward in realising the ambition to bring the world to the NT and the NT to the world, today a new collaboration between the NT, Bloomsbury Publishing and **Educational Theatre Association (EdTA)** means public school teachers across the United States who are members of EdTA will have free, unlimited access to the National Theatre Collection via Bloomsbury's Drama Online. The partnership aims to support the future of theatre education across the globe and bring the best of British theatre to new audiences, reaching an estimated **5,000 schools** across **all 50 US states** and **Washington DC**. This major expansion follows a successful project with New York City Public Schools which has brought free access to the Collection to 35,000 children across 300 public schools in the city so far, growing to 350 public schools by the end of the academic year.

Seven new plays are also now live on the National Theatre Collection on Drama Online in partnership with Bloomsbury Publishing, bringing over 80 theatre productions and complementary learning resources to UK schools, colleges, universities and the wider education sector to enrich drama teaching and inspire students.

The new titles feature recent National Theatre hits including the joyful reimagining of Oscar Wilde's ***The Importance of Being Earnest*** starring **Ncuti Gatwa** and **Sharon D Clarke**, **Nye** celebrating the life and legacy of Nye Bevan who transformed Britain's welfare state starring **Michael Sheen**; an adaptation of Noel Streatfeild's best-selling children's book ***Ballet Shoes***; and **Malorie Blackman's *Pig Heart Boy*** for primary schools in collaboration with the Unicorn Theatre, Sheffield Theatres and Children's Theatre Partnership; alongside pertinent global stories including ***Kin***, ***The Boy with Two Hearts*** and ***Blues from an Alabama Sky***.

**Kate Varah, Co-CEO and Executive Director of the National Theatre, said:** *"Locally, nationally, internationally, our new and expanded programmes will reach over 1.4m young people across the UK this year alongside an estimated 230,000 students in the US. Designed to support educators and offer more access to school students everywhere, these innovative programmes all boost creativity, social skills and mental health. We know a rich creative curriculum fires imaginations, builds confidence, and inspires the next generation of*

*theatre-makers, performers and audiences – and we are committed to devising new and innovative ways to widen participation so more can benefit.”*

**Michael Sheen, Actor, said,** *"I'm delighted that Nye, in which I play Aneurin Bevan, can now be watched in classrooms, colleges and universities around the world with the National Theatre Collection, and it's completely free for UK state schools. I believe it's so important for children to access the arts from an early age and at a time when arts in schools is being increasingly marginalised, resources such as this are vital tools for teachers to use in their classrooms to inspire creativity in the next generation of theatre-makers".*

### **Free theatre tickets for local London schools**

The National Theatre and **Mitsubishi Estate London** are proud to launch a new five-year partnership to support young people's access to the arts. This major new initiative will provide thousands of students from schools across Greater London with free tickets to the National Theatre's stand-out productions. Bespoke learning resources will also be created to bring stories from the plays and its themes into classrooms.

This year, 1,000 young people will be able to enjoy performances of ***Hamlet*** and ***Ballet Shoes*** on the South Bank, reflecting the National Theatre's commitment to creating transformative experiences for young people through daring, innovative work that sparks imagination and opens up new ways of seeing and understanding the world.

The partnership is part of Mitsubishi Estate London's wider commitment to cultural engagement in the local area, including its redevelopment of the neighbouring 72 Upper Ground site.

### **Theatre Trip Toolkit to support pathways for young people to experience theatre**

Across recent decades, young people's access to live theatre has sharply decreased, with the recent DCMS Participation Survey finding only 29% of 11–15-year-olds are currently engaging with theatre out of school. In a collaboration between the National Theatre, Children's Theatre Partnership and the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Theatre Trip Toolkit is a new practical guide to help theatres and theatre companies build better connections with schools to ensure more young people have the chance to experience live performance.

The first of its kind, the toolkit provides a framework for theatres, arts centres, producers and touring companies of all sizes and scales to build schools audiences for performances and meet the practical needs of schools, teachers and young people. The toolkit has been created by Indigo Ltd in consultation with theatres, arts centres, touring companies, teachers and educators, working in all areas of education and at all sizes of theatres and theatre companies, and was supported by Arts Council England.

To view the toolkit, click [here](#).

### **Upcoming nationwide schools tours**

Following the opening of ***Bacchae*** this month, and in an exciting move to bring the main stage programme directly into schools, the production is being adapted by **Nima Taleghani** to tour secondary schools and colleges around the country, directed by **Hannah Hauer-King**. A modern retelling of Euripides' ancient Greek tragedy brought to life through rhythm,

music and movement, the nine-week tour will reach over 10,000 students in schools across England, running in Autumn 2026.

The National Theatre's partnership with the Unicorn Theatre, the UK's leading theatre for young audiences, will also see the venues co-producing a touring production for the first time, widening their reach for primary school audiences. ***The Last Wild***, in a new version for primary school audiences, adapted by **Jude Christian** from the award-winning novel by Piers Torday, will be directed by the Unicorn Theatre's Artistic Director and former Peter Hall Associate at the National Theatre, **Rachel Bagshaw**. Opening at the Unicorn Theatre in February 2027, the production will tour to venues and schools in areas across England, doubling the reach of previous National Theatre primary tours.

### ***Dear England* nationwide schools programme**

As the acclaimed production of *Dear England* embarks on its national tour across England, the National Theatre is running a schools engagement programme supported by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport responding to the events of VE and VJ Day and this significant period of the UK's history, reaching over 10,000 young people.

It is delivered in schools across England with assemblies and workshops using spoken word and sound design to support students to share the hopes and aspirations they have for themselves, and other young people, 80 years from now. The resulting sound archive will form a unique 2025–2026 time-capsule. Students will also be invited to see performances of *Dear England* during the tour, with subsidised tickets for 8,000 young people nationwide.

**Ian Murray, Arts Minister, said:** *"This is a great opportunity for children across the UK. The National Theatre's work is a jewel in the crown of Britain's world-leading arts sector and these shows can inspire a whole new generation of writers, actors, designers, and more. I'm thrilled that we have supported the National Theatre's schools programme. Together we're helping over 10,000 young people delve into themes of resilience and identity on Dear England's nationwide tour, with over a million more students enjoying creative workshops exploring everything from the Second World War to their hopes for the future. This is arts for all in action"*

### **ENDS**

For more information, please contact Rhian Bennett, Press Manager Learning & National Partnerships: [rbennett@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:rbennett@nationaltheatre.org.uk)

Link to images [here](#).

**With thanks**

### **Nationwide Learning**

*The Mohn Westlake Foundation supports nationwide Learning programmes for young people.*

*Nationwide Learning is also supported by Buffini Chao Foundation, Clore Duffield Foundation, Tina Alexandrou, Crevan O'Grady & Jane McClenahan, Delta Air Lines, The Anthony and Elizabeth Mellows Charitable Settlement, Tioc Foundation, MFPA Trust Fund for the Training of Disabled Children in the Arts, The Kartik Foundation, The Alchemy Foundation, and Behrens Foundation and the Archie Sherman Charitable Trust.*

## **NT Collection**

*Lead philanthropic support from Richard and Kara Gnodde. NT Collection is also supported by The Attwood Education Foundation, Mike Staunton and The Michael Marks Charitable Trust. National Theatre Collection in New York City is supported by Penny and Bill Bardel.*

## **Secondary Schools Touring**

*Secondary Schools Touring is supported by The Mohn Westlake Foundation, The Ingram Trust, The Constance Travis Charitable Trust, The Britford Bridge Trust, The Dow Clewer Foundation, and Mike Staunton.*

## **Primary Schools Programme**

*The Primary Schools programme is made possible by the Hearn Foundation.*

## **About the National Theatre**

The National Theatre makes theatre that entertains and inspires using its creativity, expertise and unique reach. We tell big stories in bold ways, offering the widest access to high quality theatre to millions of audience members across the UK and around the world – on our own stages, on tour, in schools, on cinema screens and streaming at home.

We bring the world to the National Theatre and take the National Theatre to the world through reimagined classic stories meeting fresh, contemporary voices. As part of our mission to celebrate and platform bold voices in British theatre, the National Theatre proudly hosts a dynamic group of Resident Companies, offering a platform for collaboration, growth, and innovation.

Through touring our work to local theatres, schools and through our nationwide education and community programmes, we are active in every local authority in the UK. We invest in talent and innovation on stage and off, taking seriously our role as the nation's theatre. We work with hundreds of schools and communities across the UK and the US to fire imagination and inspire creativity. The National Theatre Skills Centre supports thousands of young people every year to develop skills and pathways for careers in theatre.

For more information, please visit [nationaltheatre.org.uk](https://nationaltheatre.org.uk)