

Young Vic

Pre-Show Information

Young Vic presents

Beneatha's Place



Written and directed by **Kwame Kwei-Armah**

This document contains detailed information about the show in order to describe what you should expect when attending.

This includes information about the content warnings, plot, the space, lighting and sound, audience participation, and further access information.

All of the information in this document was correct at the time of publishing. More information will be available closer to the time of performance.

Please note that by discussing the content of the show, **the below information will contain key plot points and descriptions of what happens in the performance.**

If you would like to receive elements of this information **but avoid these spoilers, please do not read the sections at the end of this document** 'Show Information' and 'Show Synopsis'.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Box Office team:

E-mail: boxoffice@youngvic.org

Phone number: 020 7922 2922

The Auditorium

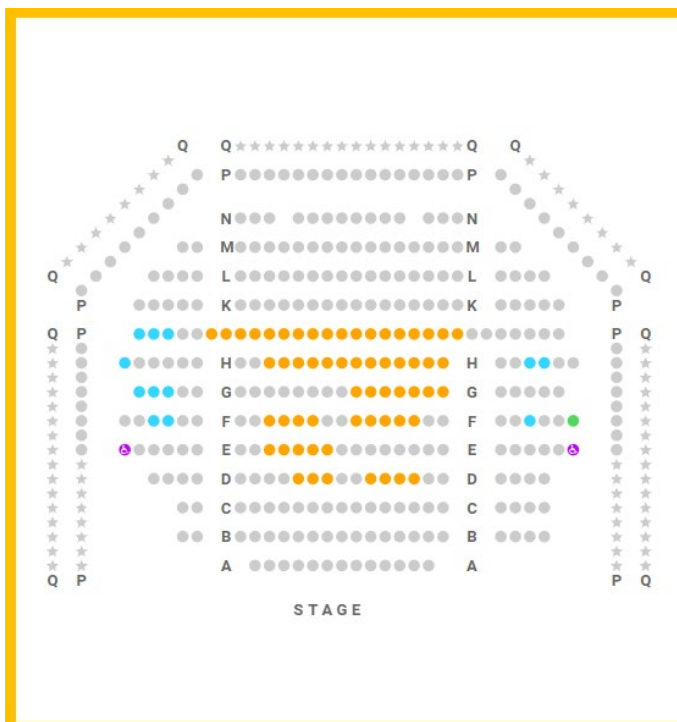
Beneatha's Place

This show will take place in our main auditorium, which is the larger of our three performance spaces.

For this performance, the space will be in an 'end on' arrangement, meaning the seats will all face the stage the same way. The maximum capacity is 422.

Access to the main auditorium is via the upstairs (rows Q – K) and downstairs (rows A – H) via the main doors. Our ushers are on hand to help you, they wear red t-shirts and jumpers with our logo.

Please arrive at the Young Vic with your ticket ready on your phone or have it printed before you enter or you can collect from box office.



Facilities:

There are toilets located on the ground and first floor at the Young Vic, via The Cut Bar. We have gender-neutral and disabled/baby changing toilets. Sanitary bins are available in all. All indoor venues will also be accessible with lifts & ramps and toilet provided.

Assistance Dogs:

Assistance dogs are always welcome at the Young Vic, if you are planning a visit please let us know in advance which performance you will be attending by calling our box office on **020 7922 2922** or e-mailing boxoffice@youngvic.org and we will be happy to look after your dog during the show.

Access for all:

For full information about our access measures, please visit our Access for all page, on our website here: www.youngvic.org/visit-us/access-for-all

Show Information:

Running Time: approx. 2 hours 15 minutes with an interval

Content warnings: This show contains strong language, racist paraphernalia, racism and racial slurs, references to death, pregnancy, and miscarriage and themes of political violence, grief and bereavement.

Light Warnings: Singular flashing light 55-60 minutes into Act I

Sound Warnings: Explosion sound effects and glass shattering sounds at 55-60 minutes into Act I

Stage Warnings: Haze in first scene and at 55-60 minutes into Act I

Decompression Space:

There is a decompression space available for anyone who wishes to step out during the show. Please let our Front of House staff know if you wish to use the decompression space and they will be happy to assist. Please note that if you do need to step out, you may need to wait until an appropriate moment to be re-admitted to the performance and you may not be able to return to the same seat.

Show Synopsis:

Act I

Prologue:

The prologue is set at the University of California. Beneatha, an African American professor, is giving a rousing speech about the importance of setting up a school of Black Studies. She insists that she, with the support of the students, will refuse to leave the auditorium until the Dean and President of the university agree to set up the school, and the students cheer in support. We hear a voice over the intercom telling them to leave, and then the sounds of sirens, screaming, and tear gas being fired.

Scene 1:

Scene 1 opens in a house in Lagos, Nigeria in 1959, in a predominantly white neighbourhood, where Peter and Joan Nelson, a white Southern Baptist missionary couple are vacating the house and awaiting the new tenants. Mr Nelson is listening to the radio, and we learn that there is escalating violence in the fight for independence. The newlywed couple Beneatha Asagai Funmilayo and Joseph Asagai Funmilayo arrive at their new home and are surprised to find that it is not empty. Beneatha is enrolled at the local university and Asagai teaches there as well as being a prominent political spokesman for the Nigerian independence movement. Beneatha has recently joined Asagai in Nigeria ahead of important independence talks that will decide the country's future. Mr and Mrs Nelson have

waited there to show them around the property, and both are very condescending, with Joan demonstrating to Beneatha how electric lights and fans work, assuming Beneatha doesn't know how to use them. Asagai is keen to get the couple to leave and so reluctantly plays along, while Beneatha rages silently and mocks Joan by ironically playing into her offensive stereotypes of Nigerians. Asagai starts unpacking his "Jim Crow memorabilia", a collection of many items including figurines and masks that are racist depictions of Black people, and Peter is embarrassed. We find out that Asagai was imprisoned by the British as part of his fight for independence. Following a particularly ignorant anecdote from Joan to which Beneatha offers her own well-chosen retort, the couple depart, and Beneatha voices her frustration to Asagai. We watch Asagai and Beneatha interact in their new house, seeing that they are very much in love, but Asagai is distracted by political worries.

Aunty Fola, a family friend and local market woman, arrives at the house and Asagai leaves to gather the rest of the couples' belongings. Fola confides in Beneatha that the British have introduced a new basket tax, that will create financial challenges for market women like herself. She also warns Beneatha that Asagai is in a dangerous political position, trapped between serving the local people by fighting for their ancestral land and pleasing other members of his party. Fola reveals that she knows that Beneatha is pregnant, even though Beneatha has told no one yet. Fola encourages Beneatha to tell Asagai about her pregnancy to steady him and make him behave carefully.

The Funmilayo's white American neighbour Daniel arrives, uninvited, ostensibly to welcome the couple to the neighbourhood. Both Beneatha and Daniel are from Chicago, and Daniel questions Beneatha in a seemingly good-natured manner, but she is resistant at first and suspicious of him. Daniel comments on the Jim Crow memorabilia that Asagai collects, and Beneatha explains it is part of his teaching technique with all his students to engage their subconscious with depictions of Blackness. Beneatha invites Daniel to put on the mask and, with her encouragement, he begins to perform racist impressions which Beneatha plays along with, allowing him to embarrass himself. Asagai arrives in the middle of this and is angry, and after Daniel leaves, he accuses Beneatha of being too close to white Americans.

Asagai and Beneatha enter into an argument that culminates in Asagai revealing that he has been voted out of his political party based on the conflict over the ancestral land and the intervention of the British. He reveals that a number of his party have been bought out by

British politicians, agreeing to remove tribes from their ancestral land so that they can profit from oil that has been found there. He reveals that he and Beneatha have also unknowingly benefited from this deal, explaining this is how the party afforded to pay for the house they are moving into. The two worry about what to do, and Beneatha is about to reveal to Asagai that she is pregnant when Daniel returns. He reveals himself to be an intelligence agent and attempts to bribe Asagai to set up an alternative party controlled by American interests, giving him a cheque. Daniel leaves, and Asagai laments the lack of historical precedence and guidance for how Black people can fight white people and win, when there is so much colonial literature that demonstrates the reverse. Looking at his Jim Crow memorabilia, Asagai then remembers a pact he made in prison with fellow members of his party never to be bought off or manipulated by white politicians. He tells Beneatha to begin packing up their things again and leaves confidently to talk to his party members, armed with the mask and Daniel's cheque as proof that they are all trying to be divided and bought out to derail political autonomy. Beneatha remains worried, imploring him to be safe. Asagai leaves Beneatha on stage alone, and we hear a loud explosion as he drives away from the house. Beneatha starts violently sobbing, and Auntie Fola comes onstage, leading her to the couch where she tries to comfort and feed her. We see Beneatha grieve as she is cared for by Fola. Backstage crew come onstage and begin to change the set in the house, covering the furniture with dust sheets. Fola holds a piece of fabric for Beneatha to change behind, and a soundscape illustrates the passing of time from 1959 to the present day. Eventually everyone exits the stage.

Act II

Act II opens in the present day in the same house. Beneatha, now in her 70s and Dean of the College of Social Sciences at an Ivy League University, is returning to her house in Nigeria for the first time in nearly 50 years with Wale, a young Nigerian American and junior lecturer at the university. We learn that Asagai died, and Beneatha lost her child at the end of act I. The two clean up the rather neglected house and discuss their concerns about the upcoming curriculum committee meeting that Beneatha has chosen to host there which seems to

carry a great deal of importance for Beneatha in relation to upholding Asagai's legacy. Beneatha explains her game plan to Wale, and her intentions for soliciting more open and transparent discussion between the group. She also shares that a previous member of the committee, Dr Phyllis, has been removed in response to a disciplinary issue and we learn that Beneatha, and by extension the university, is being targeted on social media by alt-right individuals.

Three white professors arrive who are also part of the university curriculum committee: Mark Bond, Gary Jacobs, and Harriet Banks. They are all complaining about the heat and speculating about who the new President of the university will be, as news of the appointment is due to be announced later that day. We learn that these five characters have gathered to discuss the future of African American Studies at the university and whether they will formally recommend to the university president that Critical Whiteness Studies should replace it a major, thus reducing African American studies to an elective. In the discussions that follow, we see how the racial tensions and colonialism that we saw Asagai and Beneatha fighting against in the first act still hold power today, particularly in the American education system.

Mark, Gary and Harriet argue extensively on either side of the debate, but both arguments centre whiteness; Gary disagrees with the introduction of Critical Whiteness Studies because he disagrees with the concept of white privilege which it would teach, while Mark and Harriet fail to see the problem with no longer teaching the history of African Americans, arguing that the discussion of race has moved on, with Mark stating strongly that Black students no longer want to learn about race in academia. The arguments become increasingly personal, and Gary even suggests that Beneatha has undeservedly gotten her position as Dean due to racial quotas. Wale shares that, as the son of a rich Nigerian oil magnate, he understands the cost of inheritance and the internal struggle and reactionary impulses that can arise from it. Things come to a head when Beneatha reveals to the group that she has been sent a racist mask by Dr Phyllis, one that is a 'c**ned' version of her. Mirroring what she did with Daniel in act 1, she holds it up to Mark's face, and challenges him to speak truth through the mask. Daniel lets slip that he feels Beneatha no longer has intellectual authority over critical race theory despite her foundational body of work in the subject.

Shockingly, when it comes time to vote, Beneatha votes for Critical Whiteness Studies to replace African American studies as a major and consequently the proposal passes on to the President for consideration. Harriet, Gary and Mark depart, Gary apologising to Beneatha as he leaves. Wale feels hurt and betrayed by Beneatha's seemingly sudden change of heart. Beneatha tries to explain that new frameworks of thinking are essential to true progress and that she believes in playing the long game.

Wale leaves, and Beneatha is alone onstage. There are a few beats of silence, then her phone begins to buzz. Gary, Harriet and Mark all return, and we find that Beneatha has been named the new University President and as such will not ratify the proposal for Critical Whiteness Studies. After expressing their surprise and congratulating her, they leave. Alone again, Beneatha plays Lord Kitchener's *The Birth of Ghana*, a song that meant a great deal to her and Asagai, and dances slowly as she reflects. A young Asagai enters and joins her in the dance, and the two celebrate her victory while acknowledging there is still a long way to go. Asagai exits. Beneatha then places the mask of herself on a shelf in the house with the other Jim Crow memorabilia before exiting as well, ending the play.

More information will be available closer to the time of performance.

If you would like any further clarification or have any questions, please do get in touch with our Box Office team.

Email: boxoffice@youngvic.org

Phone number: 020 7922 2922

See you soon!

Welcome Team