

Our new Patron, Jessica Hynes, declares: *'I don't think drama should be saved!'*



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At our Drama Spa conference (April 2018) we were so inspired by the Keynote given by writer and performer, Jessica Hynes, that we instantly invited her to become a Patron of National Drama, which she graciously accepted. Hynes has worked prolifically in television, film and theatre, but it was her very genuine understanding of the critical importance of drama in schools that resonated with every drama teacher in the room. Hynes recognises that school-based drama is not exclusively about young people aspiring to be actors and actresses. Her visits to twenty different drama departments, where she delivered workshops and took time to speak to pupils, reinforced her belief that drama is vital to the growth and development of everybody. In a passionate recount of her experiences, Jessica celebrated the freedom that the drama space can offer and the opportunities for pupils to be, 'praised, applauded, seen and acknowledged and... be funny.' She elaborated on the many connections she witnessed being shaped and formed in the drama classroom. Children, of all abilities, were engaging empathetically with each other, social skills were being honed, confidences were growing, participants' imaginations were being stimulated and the potential to 'play' out their futures was magical.

Yet, in spite of all this creative learning and the numerous and significant benefits for young people, many drama departments were condemned to the rickety shed at the back of the school and

teachers were having to fight and campaign to keep their subject on the curriculum: (many of you will feel this pain!). In one situation, a girl in a mining town told Jessica that her school was not offering drama now because everyone was being forced to do more maths and algebra, even though most of them would not pass it. The loss of drama to this school was truly felt by the pupils who said drama was where they 'had fun' and could 'connect', but there was no money to pay the drama teacher. In other schools, pupils were being taken out of their drama lessons and rehearsals to do extra maths or some other subject they were not great at.

This has infuriated Jessica who asks WHY? WHY is drama less valued? WHY does anyone think it is okay to take pupils out of a subject which is so vital to their development? WHO has decided that STEM is more important than STEAM? (I am re-phrasing but, trust me, Jessica Hynes spoke with passion and anger at the short-sightedness of education ministers and those who write government policies.)

As we listened to Jessica's keynote, which she delivered with all the finesse, clarity and humour for which she is widely acclaimed, we could not fail to notice that she 'gets us'. She truly understands the role of the drama teacher and drama in schools, and she is steadfast in her commitment to be an advocate, working



alongside National Drama.

Jessica wants the best for our children and our society. She speaks for us all when she visualises a world in which people are empathetic, happier and connected. She recognises that drama in schools works in a profound way to engender these qualities in the very people who are our future, our society. She is motivated by her genuine joy of life.

In her closing statements, Jessica reminded us that some of our best memories are made in the drama room, and that the work undertaken is inextricably linked to the society in which we live and the society we want. Together with her professional colleagues and all at National Drama, Jessica will lead us in 'shining a light' on the importance of maintaining how important drama is in schools: 'we are all in this together.'

In case you are wondering what Jessica actually said it was, 'I don't think Drama should be saved. It should be **COMPULSORY**'

We welcome Jessica to National Drama and are very excited about the future.