



THE BROWN SUITE

EDUCATION
PACK

WOLVERHAMPTON
GRAND
THEATRE

BLACBRIK



Powered By
**FUNDAMENTALLY
DANCE.**

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SETTING THE STAGE

The Brown Suite is a funk and soul-fueled dance-theatre production set to the sound of the 1970s, featuring music by *James Brown*, *Etta James* and *Sam Cooke*.

Through rhythm-driven vignettes, it explores human connection, power, and play, inviting audiences into a world where groove becomes story.

The activities in this pack use creative and practical approaches to explore the themes within *The Brown Suite*. Like tracks on a record, the activities can be used in any order. Remix, layer and follow the groove that works best for your group.

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BEHIND THE BEAT

Before exploring the work, take a moment to meet the artists behind *The Brown Suite*.

Fundamentally Dance is an independent production company creating, producing and touring bold, audience-first experiences across the UK and beyond. At its core is a simple idea: to create more dance for audiences to enjoy, and to celebrate the artists on stage. Working at the intersection of arts and entertainment, it delivers high-quality, imaginative productions in both traditional theatres and unexpected spaces for a global audience.

Its flagship production, *Ballet Nights*, has captivated audiences across the UK, Europe and Australia with over 25 performances. Known for its curated international artists, exceptional production values and intimate atmosphere, it offers a rare, up-close experience of world-class dance.

The *An Evening With* series brings audiences closer to leading performers through intimate events that blend performance, storytelling and insight.

Through *New Voices*, the company champions emerging choreographers, presenting bold new work in unconventional venues and reaching diverse, younger audiences.

In September 2026, **Fundamentally Dance** will premiere *The Brown Suite*. The next step in its vision. This high-energy dance theatre work, inspired by the music and legacy of *James Brown*, *Etta James* and *Sam Cooke*, is designed to move, entertain and unite a broader audience, combining dynamic choreography, striking design and powerful storytelling.

Fundamentally Dance is reshaping how dance is made and experienced, bringing bold, high-quality productions to wider and more diverse audiences. With a growing portfolio and ambitious new work like *The Brown Suite*, it is setting a new standard for accessible, artist-led dance on a global stage.

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BEHIND THE BEAT

BlacBrik is the choreographic duo of **Nahum McLean** and **Darius Drooh**, known for creating emotionally resonant, rhythm-rich dance theatre rooted in story, identity, and cultural expression. Their combined credits span *The Lion King*, *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater*, *Richard Alston Dance Company*, and *Ballet Nights*, with their work presented at Sadler's Wells (Lilian Baylis), The Place, Leicester Curve, Cadogan Hall, and more. Together, they build physical worlds that are musically driven, emotionally open, and made to move.



Nahum McLean is a London-based choreographer and dance-theatre maker driven by rhythm, musicality, and human connection. Trained at Prodanza Ballet Academy (Havana) and on scholarship at The Ailey School (New York), he has performed internationally across contemporary dance, ballet, theatre, and film. This embodied experience informs a movement language rooted in musical intelligence, precision, and instinct. Nahum is also the Founder of ADDA (African Diaspora Dance Association), supporting culturally grounded professional dance practices.



Darius Drooh is a choreographer and movement artist blending classical technique, contemporary athleticism, and groove-based forms. Trained at The Ailey School, EDGE Performing Arts Center, and New Style Motherload, he brings a grounded, responsive, and musically intelligent physicality to performance and choreography. His work emphasizes performer-led, rhythmically precise movement, attentive to sound, space, and proximity.



Before diving into the work, take a few minutes to bring the group into the world of *The Brown Suite*.

These short activities are designed as quick starters. Use them to wake up the body and focus the mind. Allow the energy to build naturally.

1 / THE SUITE SOUND OF MUSIC

Play a short piece of soul or funk music.

Ask students to consider:

- What mood or atmosphere does this music create?
- Does the song go through any phases? Are there any shifts or mood changes?
- If you were to create a piece of movement to this, what would it be?

Example Track: *Something's Got a Hold on Me* - Etta James

[Listen on YouTube](#)

2 / SAY IT, MOVE IT

Give students a word linked to the themes of *The Brown Suite* such as:

Power, tension, party, fracture, release

Ask students to create a short movement response or scene using these words as a starting point.

3 / A CHANGE IS GONNA COME

In pairs, students begin with a mirror exercise. One student leads and the other follows, copying the movement as closely as possible. Keep the movement controlled and connected.

At a chosen moment, introduce a break. One performer makes a movement that is not mirrored, disrupting the connection. Both continue independently for a few moments before finding a way to return to unison.

When sharing, ask the audience what changed, when it happened, and what it suggested. What kind of relationship or situation could this represent?

What made the break clear and how did returning to unison affect the meaning?



IN THE MIX



SAY IT LOUD

Start by bringing students into the world. Ask what they know about the 1970s soul and funk era. What was happening socially and culturally? Who held power? What kind of atmosphere might have existed at that time? Use their responses to build a clear picture of the time, setting and energy the work is inspired by. If students aren't sure, drop in a few prompts or examples to help get things moving.

Explain that students will take part in a whole-class debate, responding to a series of statements. For each one, they choose yes, no or maybe, and be ready to explain their choice.

You can run this in different ways depending on your group.

Create a line across the room, with yes at one end and no at the other. Students place themselves along the line depending on how strongly they feel and can shift position as their thinking develops.

Or turn it into a spotlight moment. Choose one student from each group to step forward and represent their side, speaking on behalf of everyone in that position.

Or take it full *Brown Suite*. Students respond through movement, letting the body speak first. Yes, is big, bold and full of energy, No, is still or stripped right back and maybe sits in between. Let the body speak first, then put it into words.

STATEMENTS

Use some examples below and invite students to come up with their own.

- Music brings people together
- You can show emotion without using words
- People act differently depending on who they are with
- Views from the 1970s are different from today
- Who you are is shaped by the world around you

Encourage students to explain their choices, challenge each other, and change their mind if someone's argument shifts their thinking.

Finish by linking back to *The Brown Suite*. How might these ideas show up in the work? How could performance choices shape what an audience understands or feels?



THE JAM SESSION

The Brown Suite is structured in three phases.

- **Pulse & Play**
- **Party & Fracture**
- **Reprise & Release**

These titles suggest a change in atmosphere.

In this activity, students will create a Groove Board, similar to a mood board, to capture the feel of a section through colour, words, music, and movement ideas.

ACTIVITY

Split your students into groups and begin by asking them to think about what emotions, relationships and movement styles might appear in that section of the performance.

Create a Groove Board that represents your chosen phase.

You might include:

- colours that represent the mood
- words that describe the energy of the movement
- musical influences or rhythms
- movement ideas or shapes

After seeing the performance, reflect on whether your ideas have changed or developed.

Discuss:

- How does the energy change throughout the performance?
- What might the choreographer be exploring through these shifts in mood and movement?



THE JAM SESSION

WHOSE WORLD?

LISTENING AND RESPONSE

We are taking it back to 1966. Set the space. Give students a moment to settle, clear a bit of room, and, if possible, lower the lights. This is about listening, not performing.

Play *It's a Man's Man's Man's World* - James Brown

[Listen on YouTube](#)

Ask students to experience it on their own. No talking, no reacting, just listen and let the track land.

Encourage them to notice what stands out. The voice, the instruments, the way the music builds, and how it sits in the body.

After listening, ask students to respond.

What did they notice? What did it make them feel? Where did the energy shift?

Bring focus to the idea of a “man’s world.” What might that mean? Has that meaning changed?

Share the line, “But it wouldn’t be nothing without a woman or a girl.” What does that add or change?

Finally, connect it to movement. Ask students how they might show what they heard or felt through the body.



THE JAM SESSION

I FEEL GOOD

A high-energy circle game inspired by the rhythm and performance style of funk and soul. This activity builds focus, confidence, and ensemble awareness. Encourage students to commit fully, using a strong voice, clear eye contact, and sharp movement.

THE SET UP

Ask students to stand in a circle where everyone can see each other clearly.

The aim is to pass energy around the circle using specific words and actions. The rhythm should stay continuous with no pauses.

If a student hesitates, uses the wrong phrase, or loses energy, give a warning. If it continues, they are out.

The Moves GET UP!

Pass the energy to the next person in the circle.

Use strong eye contact and a sharp shoulder flick. Say "GET UP!" clearly.

The next person must respond immediately.

The Moves I FEEL GOOD!

Send the energy across the circle.

Jump slightly forward, land in a strong stance and double point to another player, saying "I FEEL GOOD!"

The receiving player responds with "DA-NUH NUH NUH NUH NUH NUH!" and a quick foot shuffle, then continues the game with "GET UP!"

Encourage this moment to feel bold and performative, like stepping into a spotlight.

The Moves HIT ME!

Reverse the direction of the circle.

Strike a confident pose and say, "HIT ME!"

The next player continues with "GET UP!"

The Moves GOOD GOD!

At any point, a player can call "GOOD GOD!"

Everyone immediately moves to find a new place in the circle.

Once settled, all players point back to the caller.

That player restarts the game.



THE JAM SESSION

PRO TIP

The rhythm should stay continuous throughout. Encourage students to stay alert, responsive and connected.

As the game develops, shift the focus from getting it right to how it is performed.

Encourage students to think about:

- Clarity of movement and gesture
- Strength and intention in their voice
- Eye contact and connection with others
- Timing and rhythm within the group

REFLECTION

- What made the game feel most alive?
- When did the energy drop, and why?
- How did performance quality affect the group?

I Got You (I Feel Good) - James Brown

[Listen on YouTube](#)



THE JAM SESSION



TRY ME

In *The Brown Suite*, there are moments where people enter a shared space and the energy shifts. People notice each other and show off, while others step back because they are not sure what's going on or feel uncomfortable.

There's a sense of play. Relationships begin to form between characters as they react to what's happening in the room.

Ask students to write from inside this moment. Imagine you are there, surrounded by people. The moment the music starts, you begin to move. Let the music guide where you go and who you find yourself drawn to.

When writing, the pen should not leave the page.

Write continuously without stopping to think or edit what's been written. There are no wrong answers. Let whatever comes out, come out.

Students can write as a voice directed at someone or a stream of thoughts happening within that moment.

Focus on relationships. Someone is trying to get a reaction. Someone is holding back. Someone is pushing too far. Someone finds confidence through someone else and begins to move with them.

Encourage students to follow the impulse of the moment. What do they want to say? What are they thinking but can't say out loud? What slips out anyway?

It's okay to repeat words or phrases if that feels right.

Keep it short and intense. Set a time limit and encourage students to stay with it, even when it feels uncomfortable. At the end of the time, ask them to quickly round off their writing, even if they are mid-sentence.

Bring it into space. Put some music on and have students share their writing out loud, directing it at someone in the room or having it spoken by someone else. Let the space stay active and responsive.

When sharing, ask who was being tested, who had control, what felt real and what was unexpected.



THE JAM SESSION



TRY ME TOO

Bring the group back together. Put some music on and return to the space from the previous activity.

Select 5 or 6 students to step into the space while the rest of the group watch.

As they move, ask them to begin speaking lines from their writing out loud.

The teacher directs what is happening. Pick out lines, voices or interactions that stand out and begin shaping the moment.

Ask for lines to be repeated. Bring two voices together. Let moments overlap or interrupt each other. Shift where people are in space.

Build a short, shared scene using their words. Let it feel responsive, layered and slightly unpredictable.

Pause and reflect with the group. What stood out? What felt real? Where did relationships start to form?

Now break students into small groups. Ask them to take what they have just seen and begin creating their own scene.

They should use their writing as a starting point, but can adapt, repeat or combine ideas.

Encourage students to take on the role of director. Decide who speaks and when, where people are in the space and how the moment develops.

Keep focused on the moment. It doesn't need to tell a full story, but it should feel clear, connected and alive.

Bring the scenes back to the group. Students perform their work, speaking their lines out loud and responding to each other in real time.

When sharing, ask what choices stood out, what relationships were clear and what moments felt strongest.

Example Track: *Try Me (instrumental)* - James Brown

[Listen on YouTube](#)



THE JAM SESSION

SOMETHING'S GOT A HOLD ON ME

This activity explores control and connection within the space, supporting students to communicate relationships physically without relying on text.

Students work in pairs, with one person leading and the other following.

At least one part of the body must stay connected at all times, so pacing and awareness are key.

Try it again, swapping roles.

Once confident, remove the leader.

Both students move together, allowing control to shift naturally without planning. They should listen through the body and stay responsive to each other.

Encourage students to notice:

- when control is taken
- when it is given
- when it slips

Bring the group back together and discuss:

Who held the power, and where did it shift? How are other students reading the interaction? What do they see happening between the two people?

This activity develops awareness and responsiveness, encouraging students to work in real time through movement, touch and shared energy. It supports understanding of how relationships can be communicated physically, and how subtle shifts in timing, focus and connection can change what an audience sees.

It links to *The Brown Suite*, where connection and control are often shown without words, and where even the smallest changes in movement can carry meaning.



FIND YOUR FUNK

When it comes to the soul and funk era, it's the music that brings people together, whether through lyrics and melody or movement and interaction. People respond to the rhythm, the language and the groove.

In this activity students respond through movement, voice or a combination of both, building rhythm within the space.

TRY IT

Create a circle.

One person steps into the middle and introduces a move, rhythm or vocal phrase.

The movement can be rhythmic and repetitive or simple and controlled.

Phrases can be harmonic and feature meaningful words, or just one or two words that develop into call and response.

The group responds by:

- copying
- building on movement or harmonies
- ad-libbing to highlight certain words, sounds or phrases.

Encourage students to stay connected to the rhythm and energy of the space.

As confidence grows, allow different students to enter, layer movements or vocals together and introduce moments of challenge, response or interruption.

Focus on how the energy shifts when different people take the space.

Split students into groups and ask them to develop their ideas further before sharing them back to the room.



AFTER THE APPLAUSE

After watching *The Brown Suite*, guide students through a short reflective session. In professional practice, reflection is used to deepen understanding, analyse choices and consider impact. Encourage students to focus on what they saw, felt and understood, rather than looking for a right answer.

Choose one or two approaches depending on your group.

- Lead a whole group discussion. What stayed with you? Which moments felt most powerful? How were relationships communicated between performers?
- Set a short-written response. Describe a moment you remember clearly, how it made you feel and what you think the work was exploring.
- Focus on performance. How did movement, music and staging work together? What choices made certain moments stand out?
- Offer a creative response. Recreate a moment, create a short piece inspired by a theme or write from a character's perspective.

Finish by bringing the group back together and sharing key thoughts. What have students taken away from the performance, and has anything changed in how they think about dance, theatre or performance?



ENCORE

This education pack supports learning across Drama, Dance and English, with links to devising, performance, analysis and creative writing.

The activities encourage students to develop skills in communication, collaboration and critical thinking, while exploring themes of identity, relationships and self-expression with both practical and written outcomes.



Community & Creative Engagement

This education pack has been created by **Tristan Jones-Smith**, Creative Engagement Manager at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre.

Tristan's work spans performance, directing and education, with a strong focus on creating meaningful opportunities for young people to engage with theatre. He has delivered workshops, led school-based projects and contributed to national programmes such as the National Theatre's *Speak Up* initiative.

At the core of his practice is creating space for young people to have a voice, particularly those who feel unheard or overlooked. This work is delivered through the Community & Creative Engagement team, which leads a wide range of inclusive projects and initiatives. The projects aim to inspire young people, support underrepresented groups, and ensure that theatre remains accessible to all.

Through projects like *The Brown Suite* education pack, the Creative Engagement team aims to open the creative process and support deeper connections to the work.

The Grand Theatre is one of the West Midlands' premier cultural venues, renowned for its intimate Victorian auditorium and diverse programme, from major touring productions, musicals, and ballet to one of the UK's largest pantomimes.

Our in-house productions, including the award-winning *Sleeping Beauty* (2025/26) and our Edinburgh Fringe debut, *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* (2024), sit alongside partnerships with organisations such as the National Theatre, Dance Consortium, and Rifco Theatre Company, reaching new audiences across Wolverhampton and beyond.

As an independent charity, we rely on the generosity of local businesses, patrons, and members to sustain our work, bringing exceptional performance, education, and engagement to the heart of the community.

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