



An **OnSide** Youth Zone

## OUR BLOG ABOUT THE NATIONAL THEATRE'S YOUTH FESTIVAL; CONNECTIONS 2026

# BRITNEY'S LOCK

BY ALEXANDRA WOOD

### WHAT IT IS...

The National Theatre Connections festival is a celebration of young people, theatre-making and the importance of access to the arts. It is one of the largest youth theatre festivals offering a chance to perform new plays and gain experience on a professional stage. This year the National Theatre commissioned 7 new plays and one returning for young people to perform, bringing together some of the most exciting writers with the theatre-makers of tomorrow.



### HOW CYZ GOT INVOLVED...

CYZ has been developing our cultural and creative programme alongside young people since launching as a 'Cultural Opportunity Zone' in 2024. Drama and chances to perform were one of things Youth Club members wanted to experience and when the opportunity for Connections 2026 was highlighted to us by Theatre by the Lake, we first thought it might be too big a step for us but then took a deep breath and applied - we were successful!

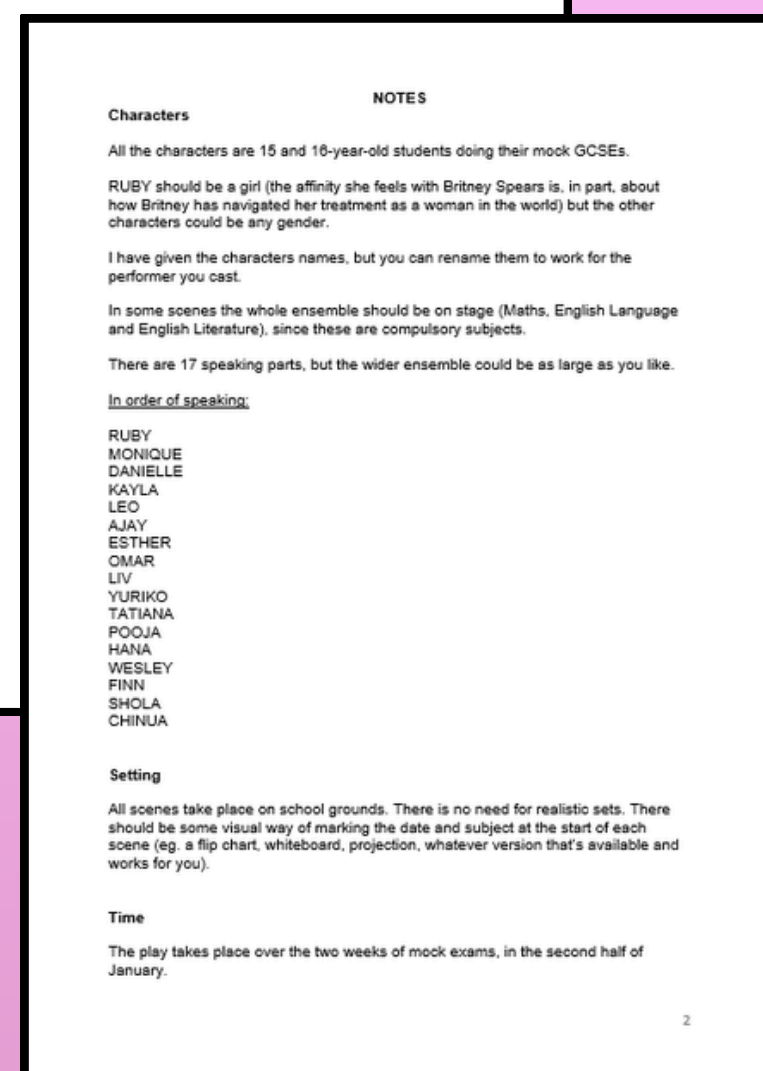
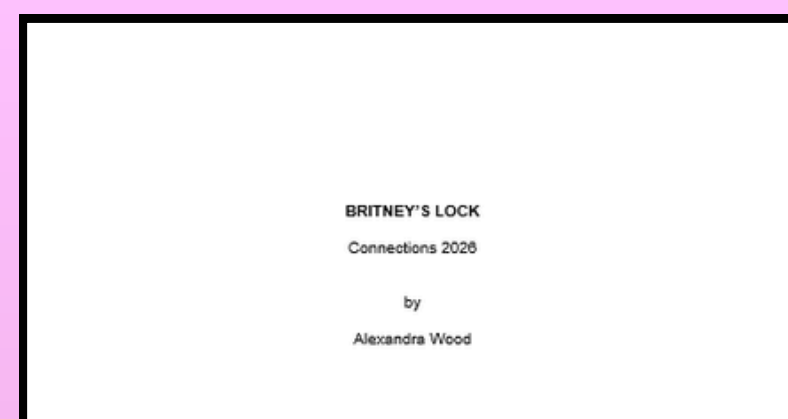
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**I LOVED IT, DOING THE  
PLAY. IT BUILT UP MY  
CONFIDENCE. I  
REMEMBERED MY LINES  
WHICH I DIDN'T THINK I  
WOULD BE ABLE TO DO.**

”

So began a whirlwind of activity as Georgia, a CYZ Senior Youth Worker, and for this project, our Director, attended introductory workshops and delved into play choosing. On exploring the script options it was clear Britney's Lock was the right choice for CYZ's Senior Youth Club drama group.

*'When Ruby acquires a lock of Britney Spears' hair as a relic to help her stay calm during her GCSE mocks, her friends dismiss it, but one by one they feel its power and want a piece of it, until it is destroyed. This funny play about how we cope in stressful situations, explores the power of belief and friendship.'*



## PREPARING FOR THE PROJECT...

National Theatre Learning Event

Connections  
Directors' Weekend

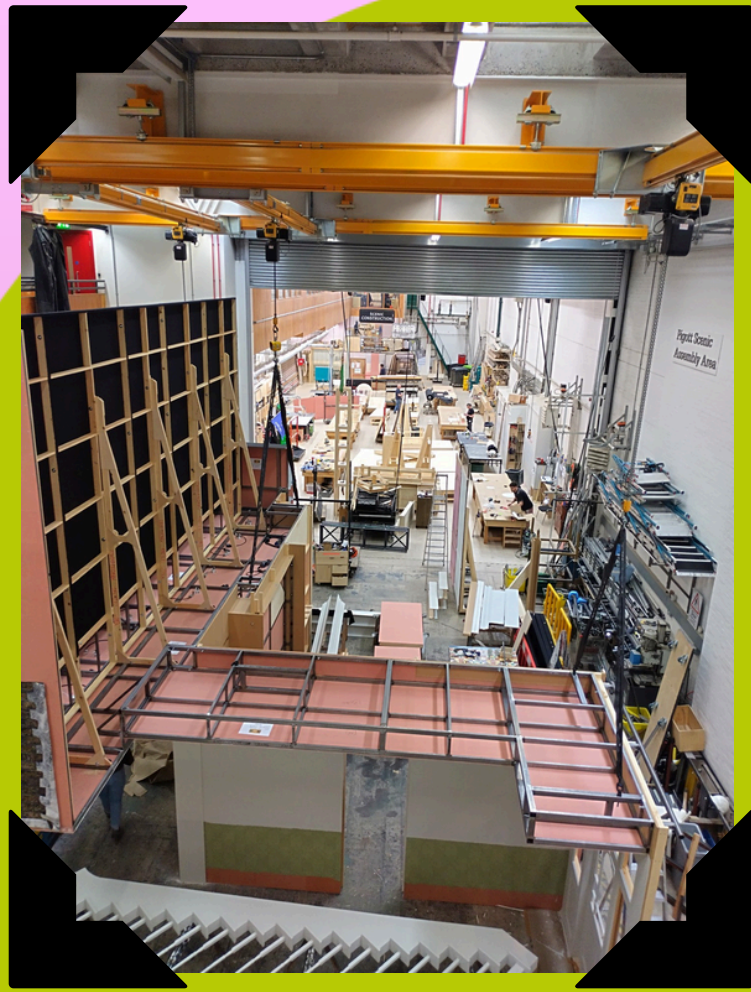
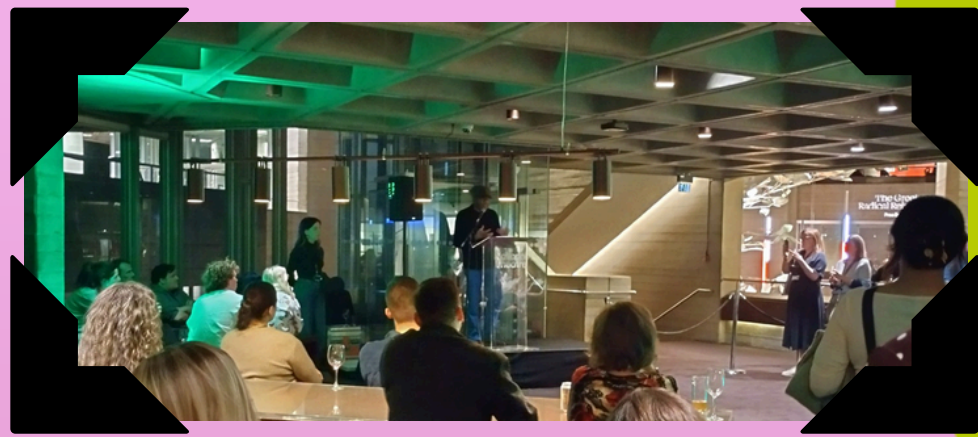
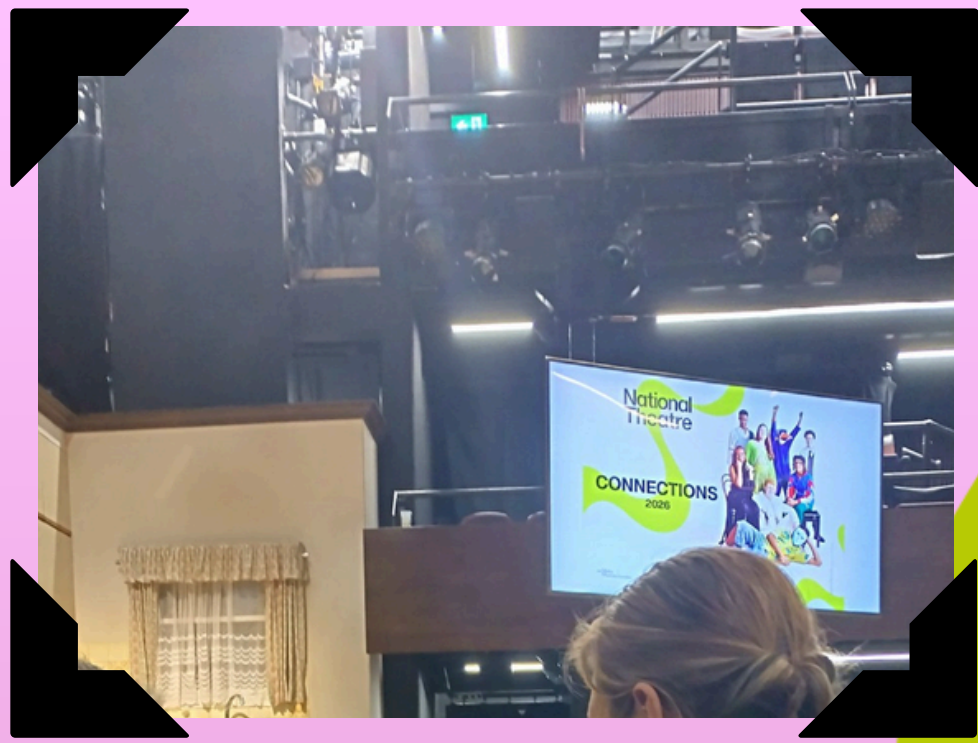


The majority of the other Directors in attendance were coming from either schools or youth theatre groups so we were excited to showcase CYZ and our Youth Clubs as creative and cultural hubs through this project.

In preparation, Georgia attended a Directors Weekend in London at the National Theatre, where she took part in workshops and masterclasses, understanding more about the project, developing skills and learning more about the play to take back to CYZ.

The workshops included:

- ★ From Page to Stage
- ★ Getting to take a guided tour of the National Theatre
- ★ Mining the Material
- ★ Costume Choices that Tell a Story
- ★ Stage Combat.
- ★ And lastly, but most crucially a full day with the writer of Britney's Lock, Alexandra Wood to learn more about the play and begin to explore potential approaches to staging it.



Back at CYZ, young people also took part in online workshops with the National Theatre which included one with the writer of the play, Alexandra. They had the opportunity to ask questions about the play, but also, inquire into Alexandra's experiences of being a playwright.

## REHEARSALS AND THE HOME PERFORMANCE...

CYZ Drama Group met every Friday during Senior Youth Club from 18:30 - 20:00. They rehearsed from the end of November 2025 until their home performance in March 2026 (taking a break for the Christmas holidays!). As well as rehearsals, one of the cast members recorded a brand new version of Britney Spear's Toxic with the multitalented Youth Worker AJ. AJ additionally recreated two other iconic Britney Spears tracks to fully embrace the plays themes.

The casts hard work and dedication all paid off at their home performance at CYZ on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March. For a few of the cast members this was their first time performing. They had the backing of friends and family, CYZ Patrons, representatives of other creative organisations in Cumbria, as well as the whole team at CYZ!

They were also visited by one of the National Theatre's mentor directors who came to give feedback to the cast and chat to them about the journey they had been on so far.

**“THE GROUP DID A FANTASTIC JOB IN THEIR FIRST PERFORMANCE OF THIS SHOW FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS, AND FOR SOME OF THEM IT WILL HAVE BEEN THEIR FIRST PERFORMANCE EVER. THERE WERE SOME NERVES AROUND LINES, BUT THE GROUP GOT THROUGH THE PERFORMANCE WITH GUSTO, AND THEY REALLY LOOKED AFTER EACH OTHER IN THAT REGARD.”**

CYZ were so grateful to all the volunteers who kindly donated lighting equipment, their expertise, and time, to ensure the young people had an authentic experience in preparation for their transfer to Theatre by the Lake for the partner theatre festival.



*Photos by Leah Penn*

# PARTNER THEATRE FESTIVAL AT THEATRE BY THE LAKE...

After the home performance CYZ drama group had three rehearsals to prepare for their Theatre by the Lake performance and work on the feedback they had received.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2026 the cast journeyed down to Keswick. They took part in two workshops looking at movement and voice. These were ran by practitioners who started out in the local area and have now gone on to become successful actors and playwrights across the country.

After a lunch break in the sun looking out over the beautiful Derwentwater (and of course a quick ice cream!) the young people completed a tech rehearsal with the Theatre by the Lake team, getting to explore the inner workings of backstage. After all of this, a well deserved pizza tea, and a final warm up with the other groups taking part in the festival, they performed Britney's Lock to around 100 audience members.

“  
**IT WAS MY FIRST TIME IN  
A THEATRE AND  
GETTING TO WATCH  
OTHER THEATRE WORK.**  
”



Afterwards the cast could chill out having the wonderful opportunity to watch two other plays written for Connections 2026 performed by young people from across cumbria.

It was a very proud day for both the young people, staff, and everyone who supported them. CYZ thanks everyone who donated their time and resources as well as those who joined us in Keswick for this amazing opportunity. Lastly a massive well done to the stars of the show, representing Carlisle and the talented young people who live here.

