



## Case Study - BRASH Theatre Company



ANKLES

A Book of Spells

**BRASH**



## Introduction

As part of our new programme, No Filter, we are showcasing youth-led creative projects within the North East and this work led us to find out more about BRASH, a young theatre company based in Newcastle who have a brand new show called Ankles launching at Northern Stage in June 2022. The show was created in collaboration with a group of young women and non-binary people living in the East End of Newcastle upon Tyne over a 2-year period.

## Who is BRASH?

BRASH is a bold, educational theatre company that strives to make sex education relevant, empowering and unafraid. Their collaborative approach to creating theatre based solely on the ideas and opinions shared by the young people they meet ensures that the final shows are a tool to showcase their concerns, thoughts and feelings.

## The project

The current project that BRASH have been working on is a show called Ankles. This is a performance piece inspired by the experiences of teenage girls and non binary people regarding gendered school uniform policies, and features spells written by the young people involved. The spells are used to cast away victim-blaming culture. The show blends poetry, movement, and a haunting musical score, to pose the question 'When will we stop teaching kids that it's girls' responsibility to keep themselves safe from sexual violence?'

## Empowering young people

BRASH want teenagers to be informed and aims to equip them with the tools to question assumptions, inequalities, and expectations related to their experiences. Ultimately they want young people to feel empowered and to take back control of their own experiences.

BRASH Theatre  
Company presents

Supported using public funding  
by Arts Council England



# ANKLES

## A Book of Spells



Thu 9 – Sat 11 Jun, 7pm  
Tickets £10  
(Limited availability  
so book early!)

Box Office: 0191 230 5151  
[northernstage.co.uk](http://northernstage.co.uk)  
Northern Stage, Barras Bridge,  
Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 7RH



## Bethan Kitchen, Executive and Artistic Director/Writer, BRASH Theatre Company

We spoke to Bethan to find out more about how the show was developed and what role the young people played.

The process BRASH use is to firstly meet the group or groups of young people that they plan to work with for an initial chat as this gives them the opportunity to raise any concerns they have or to let the BRASH team know about any pressing issues they have with regards to sex, relationships or education.

### Picking a theme for the show

BRASH Theatre Company only creates shows based on the topics and issues that the young people feel passionate about. The initial idea for any new piece of work always comes directly out of their discussions. It was at one of these discussions that the issue of the school uniform policy was brought up and the teenagers shared their thoughts about why the policy was different depending on your gender. BRASH were told that females were not allowed to have their ankles on show at school. This then developed into talking about the body, cultural perceptions of women and violence towards women and the premise for the show that would become Ankles was formed.

## Planning and development

After the initial development chats BRASH ran regular workshops with the young people and documented their individual experiences. As a company, BRASH always stay in touch with the young people they work with by providing ongoing support and help. This enables them to fully explore, process, and take action in relation to any issues raised in the creation of their shows and creative projects.

As the show progressed the young people produced an anthology of spells in the form of short poems to be used in the show. BRASH ran a masterclass that explained what a spell was and how to write one.

BRASH had the young people perform and record the spells to be used in the final show, which was written by BRASH and based on the personal experiences of the young people involved. Once the BRASH team and the young people were happy with the story the final script was created. BRASH then began rehearsals with their actors and the performance dates were scheduled in.





## The final show

The final show is performed by the BRASH company but the young people have shaped the theme and show script. Their voices are heard within the show as recordings of their spells are played to the audience.

BRASH found that young people like this way of working as it allows them to share their opinions but they can also remain anonymous. Often what they are sharing is very personal and political and so anonymity is important to them.

## Youth voice

We spoke to a few of the students involved in creating the show *Ankles* to get their personal perspective on working collaboratively on a theatre production and they shared some really interesting insights.

**What has it been like working with BRASH?**

“Working with BRASH has been one of the best parts of my life. They have been so understanding, supportive and non-judgmental.”

“I loved it, everyone really listens to what you have to say and takes you seriously, they respect your ideas”

**What made you want to get involved in this project?**

“I love the company and I am familiar with their important work. Their previous shows have had a big impact on my life and I wanted to help provide some material that would help to continue their good work.”

**Have you learned any new skills by taking part in this project?**

“Confidence and positivity about my identity”

“It’s helped me to create a writing style. Also, I had never tried poetry before and I have found it’s a good way to express myself”

**How do you feel about gendered school uniform policies?**

“I feel like they are outdated and damaging for everyone. “

“It seems unfair that females are treated differently to males and I feel the uniform sexualises our bodies”

## Making change

The show itself aims to address an important cultural issue and the concerns that these young people have about society as a whole. We asked both the BRASH team and the young people what they hoped audiences would get out of the show. Here's what they said: BRASH hope that adult audiences will sit up and listen to what the young people have to say and their experiences, and will make the changes necessary to make the world a safer, fairer place for them. This includes decision makers considering a change in their policies around school uniform to ensure schools can't enforce gendered uniform rules.

## Young people:

“We would like people to have confidence in their identities and to stand up for themselves when they have been made to feel small. We also want to spread awareness and educate adults about diverse gender identities.”

