RESOURCE PACK THE CERTIFICATE

A monologue on statelessness

Written by Ruwanthie de Chickera

Partners

Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion Empathy and Risk UNHCR — Sri Lanka

stages theatre group



All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or in any from or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent publisher.

RESOURCE PACK
The Certificate

First published (online) 2020 © 2020 Stages Theatre Group ISBN 978-624-5487-20-2

RESOURCE PACK THE CERTIFICATE

A monologue on statelessness

Written by Ruwanthie de Chickera

Partners

Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion Empathy and Risk UNHCR – Sri Lanka The Certificate is a play about children, performed by a child. Statelessness is a problem created by adults. But many children are affected by it. And so, this resource pack has been written for both adults and children.



WHAT WILL YOU FIND IN THIS STUDY PACK?

This resource pack comprises 3 sections. We hope you will find all three sections useful.

THE ISSUE - STATELESSNESS

This resource pack addresses a global crisis — Statelessness - through the performance of a play. The first part of the resource pack will help you deepen your knowledge on statelessness, the people caught up in it and the people working to address it.

THE PLAY - THE CERTIFICATE

The Certificate is a monologue which addresses the issue of statelessness through the perspective of a child. Through this section of the resource pack you will understand how this play was created and how it developed.

THE INTERVENTION – ARTS AND ACTIVISM

Obviously... (haha)... everything in this study pack will be channeled through our experience of developing, performing and experimenting with the monologue The Certificate.

Contents

THE ISSUE - STATELESSNESS

	What is Statelessness?	5
	Stateless People	7
	Statelessness in Sri Lanka	8
THE F	PLAY - THE CERTIFICATE	
	What is The Certificate?	11
	The story of this play	12
19.4	Why this play?	16
tak iy	Responses to The Certificate	19
THE I	NTERVENTION - ARTS AND ACTIVISM	
	What is Activism in the Arts?	21
	The Certificate – From Performance to Interruption	22
	Responses to The Certificate as an Interruption	26
	Artists involved in Statelessness	28





Rohingya People Fleeing Violence reuters.com

WHAT IS STATELESSNESS?

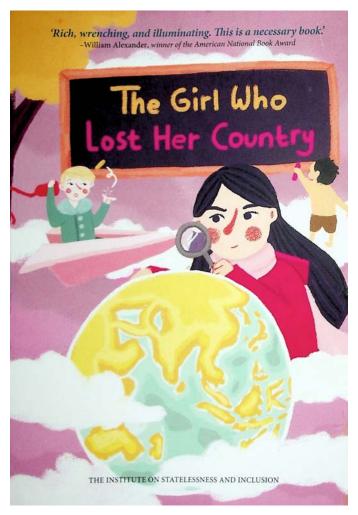
A stateless person is someone who does not have a nationality.

This means that all the basic rights that come with being a citizen of a country – the right to vote, to own land, the right to education, medical care, the right to travel, the right to protection by the law and protection by the State, to marry and to pass on citizenship to your children... all these things that people with citizenship take for granted, are not guaranteed to a person who is categorized as being

stateless or one who does not have a nationality.

While the world agrees that every human being has a basic right to a nationality, there are still an estimated 10-15 million people in the world who are stateless. Follow this link to understand a person's basic right to a nationality more.

For more insight into the issue of statelessness visit the website of the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion.



The Girl Who Lost Her CountryThe Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion

If you are a child and like to learn about Statelessness, here is a children's book on the issue – Finding Neha. You might find this more interesting.

STATELESS PEOPLE

Official statistics claim that there are over 10 million stateless people in the world. Activists place the undocumented figure at approximately 15 million people.

Statelessness Issues

Being rendered stateless can happen to a person because of birth, because of laws that discriminate against women, because of natural disasters, because of political unrest and wars, because of purposeful measures to destroy entire communities of people and because of personal and political victimization of individuals. Because statelessness can be inherited, there is a high number of Stateless children in the world.

Listen to the Co-Director of the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion Amal de Chickera talk to Stages Theatre Group about Statelessness – How big is the problem? What is the biggest challenge? Stateless children.

Statelessness Communities

Statelessness is experienced by individuals and it is also experienced by entire communities. Throughout the ages there have been many ethnic and religious communities that have been targeted and attacked in a way that destroys their very identity and their right to life.

Statelessness and Women

Discriminatory laws against women is a fundamental cause of statelessness. There are still several countries in the world which do not allow women to pass on their nationality to their own children – resulting in many children being born stateless.

Deepthi Gurung of Nepal, a former stateless woman who fought for years to obtain citizenship for her and her daughters speaks about her activism on statelessness.

STATELESSNESS IN SRI LANKA

Did you know that Sri Lanka also has a considerable history tied up with the issue of statelessness? Here is some basic background information. We hope you will research into this area further.

Stateless population in Sri Lanka

During the British rule, Tamils from Tamil Nadu were recruited to work in tea, coffee and coconut plantations of Ceylon.

Due to the continuous recruitment that took place and also the fast rate at which this population grew, by 1921 this group of people – commonly referred to as Hill Country Tamils constituted 13.5 percent (602,700) of the total population of the country. By 1936, this number and the percentage had risen even further. The Hill Country Tamils now numbered 1,123,000 or 15.3 percent of the total population and many of these were not citizens of Ceylon. They didn't belong to either India or Ceylon.

Some segments of the Sinhala community resented this growth of the Tamil population and pressured the government to send these people back to India. And so one of the first things that took place as soon as Sri Lanka received Independence in 1948 was that the government introduced the Ceylon Citizenship Bill.

This act granted citizenship to about 5,000 Hill Country Tamils. However, more than 700,000 people (about 11%) were either non-citizens of Ceylon or became stateless.



Echoing Hills (2018)A Documentary by King Ratnam

For the next several years the Indian and Sri Lankan governments failed to address this issue. The Indian and Pakistani Residents Citizenship Act (1949) [6] did not solve it; in 1954, the Nehru-Kotelawala Pact did not adequately resolve it [7]. In 1962 there were still about 975,000 people caught in limbo between these two countries - classified by Sri Lanka as "Indian nationals" and by India as "stateless".

Here is a recent report looking at the legacy of statelessness of the Hill Country Tamils, "Towards Meaningful Citizenship" It is said that during the repatriation, the people who were being separated from their families and the only home they had known, were weeping so loudly that the sound of the train approaching the station was drowned. This event is famously known as the "Oppari Kochi" in Tamil, meaning the weeping train.

Click here to watch a film on the Echoing Hills.



WHAT IS THE CERTIFICATE?

The Certificate is a short monologue performed by a stateless child which questions the very basic premise of a being declared a stateless human being.

The Certificate is about 15 – 20 mins long. The child who speaks is about 13 or 14 years old and she addresses the audience directly with the questions she has about statelessness through her own life experience.

Though *The Certificate* can be performed in the conventional style of performance, it is best experienced as an intervention within a bigger event. This means, that *The Certificate* works best when it is 'not performed' or when there is confusion about whether what is experienced is a performance or something real.

But first, let us take a closer look at the play...



THE STORY OF THIS PLAY

For a moment... let's imagine this little play - (and it really is only very little) — is stateless. What then would its story be?

The Certificate is only a few years old. It was born in London in 2017 on a very cold January day. There were a number of people who witnessed the birth of this monologue - though some may have already forgotten it. These were the people who came to the launch of the report "The World's Stateless' by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion. The book launch was an important event because it brought attention to the issue of stateless children and called for immediate action to address childhood through mobilisation, statelessness advocacy, litigation and other means. The event was well attended and several key individuals and organizations involved in the issue of Statelessness, including Melanie Khanna (UNHCR), Catherine Harrington (Global Campaign for Equal

Nationality Rights) and Laura Bingham (Open Society Justice Initiative).

When The Certificate was first born, no one really remembered to take pictures, but one person did have the presence of mind to take a video of it on a phone. This birth is on record and we are very grateful that this evidence exists.

The Certificate was first brought to life by a young student activist called Kadhija Badri. After her performance many people said that The Certificate raised some very important questions about the issue of Statelessness. But then after the event, The Certificate was forgotten for a while. It was as if it had never existed.

* * *

The Certificate was born again in 2017 in another small country right across the globe – on a warm day in June. The name of this country is Sri Lanka. This time the UNHCR knew about its birth and noted it down.

In Sri Lanka, The Certificate was brought to life within a context of World Refugee Day. There were many issues connected to Refugees which were discussed on this day but The Certificate reminded people about the issues particular to Statelessness — which are different to the issues related to Refugees. The Certificate was performed by Shyalina Muthumudalige — who was even younger than Kadhija. The adults who watched Shyalina bringing The Certificate to life were impressed by how much a little girl knew about such complex adult issue.

But then again, though some people worked hard to get The Certificate proper recognition, after a few attempts The Certificate faded again into non-existence. Again it was like it had never existed.

* * *

The most public and unexpected birth of The Certificate was 2 years later in June 2019 in the Hague, The Netherlands. This was at the first World Conference on Statelessness – and it was organized by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion. The Certificate was brought to life as part of the CANCELLED arts programme curated by Empathy and Risk.

The CANCELLED arts programme was created by artists and its intention was to complement and challenge the World Conference on Statelessness. *The Certificate* played a big part in this plan.

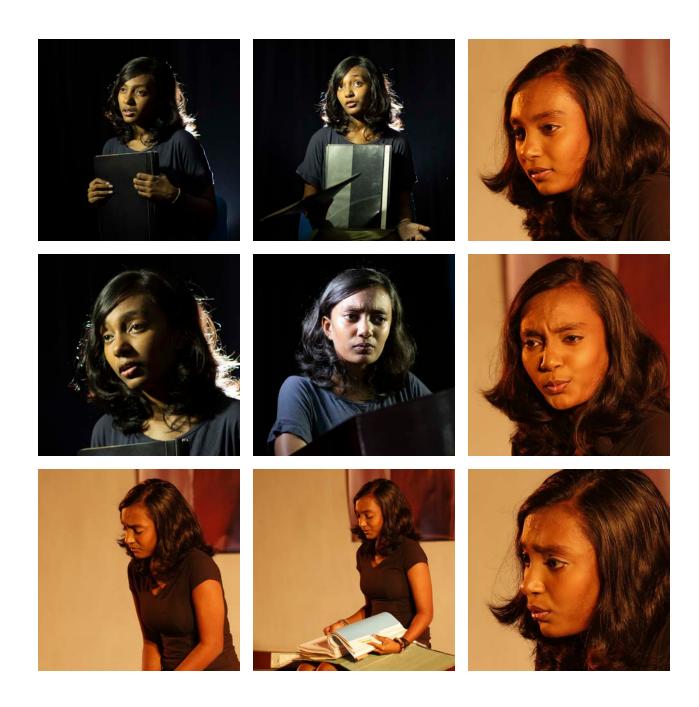
C-NC-LL-D

At the Opening Plenary of the Conference, just after speech of the Key Note Speaker - Radhika Coomaraswamy, The Certificate interrupted the proceedings with a series of questions it put to the 300 people gathered. The people at the plenary were confused by the interruption caused by The Certificate. They did not expect it. They didn't know if The Certificate was a performance or a real event. Some of them didn't believe The Certificate was a performance even after the event.

So though many people saw The Certificate – there was still some confusion about its existence.

So this is the simple story of this little monologue The Certificate, and how it struggled to get its identity.

The people that the play is about – stateless people – struggle with having to prove their identity and their existence within a system that denies them nationality but then also insists, that in order to be acknowledged and treated as a human being, one needs to have a nationality.



WHY THIS PLAY?

A reflection by the playwright Ruwanthie de Chickera

I think like most people who accept, without questioning, all the identities that are given to them — identities of gender, ethnicity, nationality etc... I have always taken for granted that I had a country and a nationality that defined me. Now though I have often grumbled about my country and protested against the limits of nation states, I don't think I can quite comprehend what it would be like to suddenly not have a nationality. And I don't think anyone can imagine this unless and until it happens to them.

I have now come to understand that when this happens to a person — when they are suddenly without a nationality, within a global system that is deeply entrenched in the idea of nation states — then they are immediately vulnerable in the deepest and most unpredictable way.

I came to know about the issue of statelessness through my brother Amal who works in this area. I started reading on it when he chose this as his life's vocation. I remember my initial incredulousness when I heard about the issue. Is this even possible? People who are not allowed to belong to any country? And then even more disturbing and unbelievable... children who are born into this situation? And finally the numbers – ten million, no twelve million, no actually closer to 15 million (its difficult to estimate as these people are often not even accounted for). Fifteen million men, women and children alive in this world at the moment who are not allowed to have a nationality? Who are not recognized as citizens of any country. It is almost as if these 15 million people should be forming their own state.

After I came to accept that statelessness was an issue and a big world issue, I faced another challenge. Now, I immediately imagined that the main reason people become Stateless was because of political victimization. Of course I had heard about atrocities against masses of people, in the past and in the present, where human beings were stripped of their identity and dehumanized and destroyed. I knew of the Rohingya, the people of Palestine, the Kurds, the Bosnian Serbs. I knew of the depths that humans could descend to, to destroy and dehumanize people.

This level of tragedy was shocking but I could begin to see how people who were deeply cruel and power hungry could plan and action such awful plans. And so I was prepared to accept that making people stateless could be a step within this kind of terrible trajectory.

What I was not prepared to find out was that, in fact, many of the stateless people in the world are stateless not because of some hateful political agenda, but because of laws that discriminate against women.

Wait. What?

Women not being able to pass on their nationality to their children results in a huge number of children being born into the perpetually helpless situation of being stateless.

Now this really was beyond comprehension. What an unnecessary problem to have in this day and age. Why would governments purposely push people into situations of being utterly powerless for their entire lives? Surely a person who cannot go to school, cannot legally do a job, cannot own land or travel – surely every person like this, who is prevented from being independent and self sufficient, who is forced to be perpetually dependent - is ultimately a huge burden on any State? So what is the rationale behind States continuing with this seemingly unnecessarv discrimination against scores and scores of the people living within its borders?

This was what I could not reconcile myself to.

So, when I was asked to write a play on Statelessness I decided that this would be what I focused on. The wasted potential of a young, talented human being – in this play a young, high achieving girl - who is just not allowed to live and function independently because of a technicality of not having a nationality. The character in this play carries with her a box file full of certificates that she has won through her entire childhood – certificates for her outstanding abilities in studies, in sports, in the arts and in all sorts of important life skills. However, without the one certificate that certifies that she is born, that she is a citizen, that she exists, none of these other certificates matter at all.

I, myself have two young daughters. When I was writing the script I tried to imagine what my children would feel like if they were everything they were but they didn't have a nationality. I read many stories and accounts of stateless children from all over the world and with each of these children I saw such tremendous potential as human beings — and also such waste, for it was clear that as they

grew up from the natural confidence that comes with childhood into the reality that they have to contend with as adults, instead of becoming stronger and more capable, they, in fact, become more and more helpless, desperate, desolate and of course, full of anger. Why not? Can you imagine a more meaninglessly frustrating situation for a young person to be in?

It was this picture and story that I wanted to put together with this monologue. It was this image I wanted people to carry home with them. The potential of a young, enthusiastic and hopeful life which will not be allowed to bloom. A child standing in front of a room of adults, asking them, in the simplest of language, how come the structures they have created mean that she does not exist.

I wish this were just a play. I wish so much it was not a reality. I wish so much it was not the reality of millions of children living in the world today.

RESPONSES TO THE CERTIFICATE

Let's look at what people who commissioned this play, performed this play and watched this play have to say about it.

This play was originally commissioned by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion – as part of their extended programme to address the issue of children and statelessness.

Amal speaks about the connection between this play and the wider issue of statelessness

This play has been most frequently performed by Shyalina Muthumudalige – who started at the age of 15. Before this Shyalina knew nothing of the issue of statelessness.

Shyalina speaks about her experience into the issue of statelessness through the character that she played. What was this journey like?

This play is the story of a young, talented girl who is stateless, because her mother cannot pass her own citizenship to her. Deepthi Gurung is a Nepalese mother of two daughters who fought for many years to gain citizenship for herself and her children. In a way, this play is about her life.

Deepthi talks about the issues of the play and how they reflect on the experience of being stateless.



WHAT IS ACTIVISM IN THE ARTS?

The Certificate started as a performed monologue but grew into something different. It became an interruption, an experience which aimed at unsettling its audience.

This kind of art has been called Activist Art, Political Art, Protest Art and even Artivism. This means that it is art that addresses a social or political issue in a manner that intends to agitate the audience to action.

In this section of the resource pack we will examine how The Certificate grew into an art of activism. We will also look at how art is being used to highlight the issue of statelessness.

Here are some more resources to explore for Arts and Activism.



THE CERTIFICATE – Performance to Interruption

The Certificate grew from a performed monologue to something wider and more urgent than that. Here is how it found its identity as an interruption, as an experience, as a call to action.



Performance 01: The Reading ISI Book Launch (London 2017)

Kadija Badri Performing
The Certificate at the ISI Book Launch
empathyandrisk.com

The beginnings of Certificate were quite informal and simple. It was written for a book launch on Statelessness in London. There was no budget for the play, so a university student activist – Kadhija Badri – volunteered to read the script. Kadhija sat cross-legged on the floor of the stage and read the script. Watch Kadhija's performance here.

Kadhija's unassuming performance worked. It became clear that this play had the best impact if it was not 'performed.'



The Certificate at the UNHCR Prauda Buwaneka

Performance 02: The Performance UNHCR World Refugee Day (Colombo 2017)

The next time the play was performed in Sri Lanka, commissioned by the UNHCR. Fifteen year old Shyalina Muthumudalige, dressed in shorts and a tee-shirt, sat on top of a desk on stage and addressed her audience casually.

The impact of a young girl questioning a group of adults with heavy, complex questions that no one could really answer was very powerful. However, attempts to use this play more as an interruption than a performance did not materialize.



The Certificate at the HagueCredits

Performance 03: The Interruption

World Conference on Statelessness (The Hague 2019)

The next opportunity for The Certificate came through the CANCELLED Arts Programme at the 1st World Conference on Statelessness in the Hague.

With over 250 top officials, diplomats, activists and academics attending the Opening Plenary of this event, after the Key Note Address of the Guest Speaker, Radhika Coomaraswamy, during the question time, an unannounced

performance of The Certificate interrupted the proceedings.

This performance was very impactful with several people – even after the performance – believing that this was a young stateless person who had found her way to the Conference in order to raise these issues at this forum.

RESPONSES TO THE CERTIFICATE AS AN INTERRUPTION

Radhika Coomaraswamy responds to Shyalina's performance at the end of her Keynote Lecture at the Opening session of the World Conference on Statelessness.



" For the past fifteen years or so I have been in positions of authority mainly at the United Nations. I try not to get used to it but am treated with a great deal of respect and deference. So at the end of my speech when this young girl got up and challenged the authority of our words with her narrative of what survivors really undergo and how we have failed them, I was taken aback. Till she started walking onto the stage I did not know it was a performance. But even for a moment she made us pause, think and reflect. Her passion kept us enthralled. It was a voice that is rarely heard in conference halls. That is the purpose of art- to challenge us to take another look at the world and to see it see it in different ways. "

Radhika Coomaraswamy

Former Under Secretary General and United Nations Special Representative on Children and armed conflict.

Deepthi Gurung shares what it felt to watch The Certificate performed at the World Conference on Statelessness.



"Shyalina's performance was not a performance. It carried the suffering of many souls. When I watched it, it was like a melted iron poured into my soul and flowed through my eyes.

I meet stateless children and families almost every day and I can never get immune to their pain. If only I could, I would pack their voices and unfold them before the world.

When Shyalina raised her hands and put forward her questions with all those files and papers she was carrying, my heart cried out. I strongly feel this medium is very powerful to reach out to the changemakers and I wish you could do this during UN general assembly too. "

Deepthi Gurung Statelessness Activist, Nepal

Click here to listen to the young actress speak about her experience of interrupting the Opening Plenary of the World Conference on Statelessness with her performance of The Certificate

ARTISTS INVOLVED IN STATELESSNESS.

The World Conference on Statelessness was the site for the CANCELLED Arts Programme – which focused the work of almost 70 artists on the issue of statelessness. The CANCELLED Arts Programme ran in conjunction with the conference, complimenting it and also challenging it through the work of artists.

Click here to watch a video on the CANCELLED Arts Programme at the World Conference on Statelessness

There are already a number of artists who are working steadily on the area of statelessness. Some of them are theatre practitioners, some visual artists, some photographers.

- Jonas Staal and the New World Summit
- Saiful Huq Omi has worked for years documenting the Rohingya community.
- Greg Constantine both photographs and speaks on the issue of statelessness

The Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion has consistently worked closely with artists in addressing statelessness. Find out why they choose to do this.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this study pack. We hope that it has given you some insight into the issue of statelessness and also the possibilities that can be created through a performance. Even a small performance. And even a small performance by a small person.



Copyright © 2020 Stages Theatre Guarantee Limited

This resource pack was produced as part of the 'Artist Research, Archiving and Documentation Project' of Stages Theatre Group.

Through this project, practicing artists engaged in systematic and critical analysis of their own work, analysing a decade worth of theatre productions and processes of Stages Theatre Group. The decade spanned the immediate ten years after the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka (2009 to 2019).

Sixteen resource packs, such as this one, were created for publication in Sinhala, Tamil and English. Each resource pack, written and researched by artists, examines the surrounding socio-political context within which these productions were created and analyses the creative decisions taken within the process. Supporting video material was also created as part of this initiative. All material produced through this research project can be found at www.stages.lk

Resource Packs

Editor (Writing): Ruwanthie de Chickera

Editor (Video): Malith Sulara

Language Editors: Nipuni Sharada Pathirage (S) King Ratnam (T)

Writers: Ruwanthie de Chickera, Pemanthi Fernando, Jayampathi Guruge, Nadie Kammallaweera, Nalin Lusena, Nipuni Sharada Pathirage, Piumi Wijesundara

Layout and Design Editors: Malshani Delgahapitiya, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha

Proofreaders: Asha Abeykoon, Geetha de Chickera, Pemanthi Fernando, U. D. R. H. K. Gunasinghe, Tracy Holsinger, Aravinda Jayasekara, Nadie Kammallaweera, Nipuni Sharada Pathirage, Sudeshna Ranmuthugala, King Ratnam, Thilaka Subasinghe

Layout and G raphic Designers: P rasad A luthwattha, D avid Cotterrell, Sanjaya Ekneligoda, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha, Venura Navod, Deshan Tennekoon

Layout Assistants: Kiyas Ahamed, Malshani Delgahapitiya, Janith Harshana

Research A ssistants: Kaushalya Attyagalle, Nalin Lusena, R ajitha Pavithra M adhubhasha, A kalanka Prabhashwara, Dinushika Seneviratne

Translators: Hiranyada Dewasiri(S/E), Arundi Jayasekara(S/E), Manuli Lavanya(S/E), Lihini Nilaweera(S/E), Jinadani Parameshwaram(T), Shamala Vedanayagam(T), Piumi Wijesundara(E)

Video Crew: Venura Navod, King Ratnam, Pramila Samarakoon, Kasun Ukwatta

Web Design and Developer: Ransaka Galmangoda

Administrators: Malshani Delgahapitiya, Mahesh Lakmal

Stages Theatre Group RESOURCE PACKS

DCS 7 Decades of Sri Lanka

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera, Nipuni Sharada Pathirage

Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

Layout and Graphic Design by: Venura Navod

DCS Girls at Checkpoints

Written by: Piumi Wijesundara

Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Venura Navod

DCS Monologues

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera Assisted by: Pemanthi Fernando

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Deshan Tennekoon

DCS Rwanda

Sri Lanka Collaboration

Written by: Nipuni Sharada Pathirage Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Prasad Aluthwatta

Grease Yaka

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera, Pemanthi Fernando Layout and Graphic Designed by: Deshan Tennekoon

Kalumaali: a fairy tale for grown-ups

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera, Nadie Kammallaweera Layout and Graphic Designed by: Deshan Tennekoon

Love and Other Objects

Written by: Jayampathi Guruge

Assisted by: Nalin Lusena

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Venura Navod

Ovaryacting!

Written by: Piumi Wijesundara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Venura Navod

Passing Stage Project

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera

Assisted by: Kaushalya Attygalle, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Sanjaya Ekneligoda, Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha

The Syrian Monologues

Written by: Jayampathi Guruge

Assisted by: Nalin Lusena

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Deshan Tennekoon

The Certificate

Written by: Ruwanthie de Chickera Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Sanjaya Ekneligoda

Thought Curfew

Written by: Piumi Wijesundara

Assisted by: Akalanka Prabhashwara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: David Cotterrell

Walking Path - a play without words

Written by: Jayampathi Guruge

Assisted by: Nalin Lusena

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Prasad Aluthwattha

Stages Artist Training Programme

Written by: Nalin Lusena

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Prasad Aluthwattha

Stages Junior Ensemble

Written by: Piumi Wijesundara

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Prasad Aluthwattha

Stages Senior Ensemble

Written by: Jayampathi Guruge

Layout and Graphic Designed by: Prasad Aluthwattha

stages theatre group