

## A Taste of Honey

The play *A Taste of Honey* is set in 1950s Salford, Lancashire – a time and a place where views on relationships, motherhood and race were very different to today's.

Jo's a 15-year-old schoolgirl who's just moved with her mother, Helen, to a rundown old flat in the nastiest part of town.

Jo feels constantly let down by Helen's absent parenting but shares her mother's acid wit;

Jo: "I hope to be dead and buried by the time I reach your age. Just think you've been living for forty years."

Helen: "I know, I must be a biological phenomena."

Jo: "You don't look forty. You look a sort of well-preserved sixty."

Helen runs off with her creep of a fiancé Peter - leaving Jo to find solace in the arms of her boyfriend - a 22-year-old black sailor.

A few months later Jo is pregnant and has been deserted by her man. She's living happily in the flat with her gay friend Geof.

But as Jo reaches the end of her pregnancy Helen turns up – with her bags – forcing Geof out.

As Jo's contractions start she tells Helen the baby will be mixed-race. Helen runs off down the pub - and Jo is left by herself singing a nursery rhyme Geof taught her.

Helen and Jo's relationship brings out the central theme of *A Taste of Honey* – motherhood;

"I never thought about you! It's a funny thing, I never have done when I've been happy. But these last few weeks I've known I should be with you."

She loves Jo – and Jo loves her – but they do so in a very unorthodox way that involves lots of fighting and insults. Maybe not so unorthodox actually...

Jo's pregnancy addresses a darker side of motherhood in the 50s. Abortion was illegal and single-motherhood – particularly with mixed-race children - was considered a disgrace.

As well as motherhood the play raises the theme of homosexuality – illegal at the time – through the likeable Geof - who is subject to horrible abuse from Helen;

# Bitesize

“Pansified little freak!”

Perhaps most significantly Shelagh Delaney, the playwright, attempts to counter the typical portrayal of the northern working classes as 'gormless' in '50s theatre - 'whereas in actual fact they are very alive and cynical' – something which is amply demonstrated by Jo and Helen.