



Hidden: from page to stage

Article Author:

[Miriam Halahmy](#) [1]

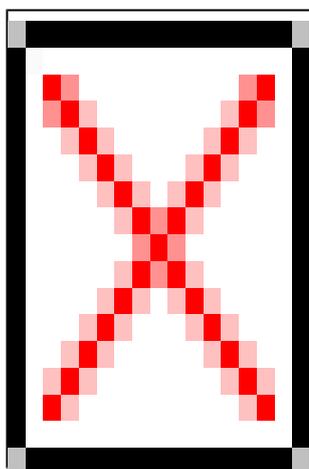
[230](#) [2]

Byline:

Miriam Halahmy on the new adaptation of her novel **Hidden**

Miriam Halahmy's Y.A. novel, **Hidden**, was first published in 2011. It was longlisted for the 2012 **CILIP Carnegie Medal** and chosen as **Sunday Times** Book of the Week. Now the book has a new life: a stage adaptation, touring from Autumn 2018. Miriam Halahmy describes its journey from page to stage.

Hidden is written in the voice of fourteen year old Alix, who lives near the beach on Hayling Island. Hayling Island is



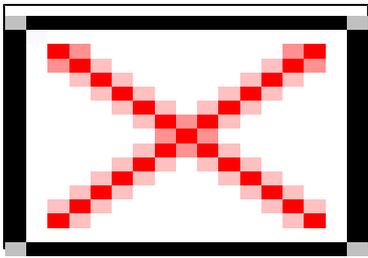
off the south coast of England, opposite the Isle of Wight, a quiet backwater, far removed from world events such as war, terror and refugees. Alix however has problems of her own: her Dad has a new life which doesn't include her, while her Mum is helpless and needy.

Then one day on the beach Alix and her school friend, Samir, pull a drowning man out of the sea. He is an illegal immigrant, desperate not to be deported. Faced with the most difficult decision of her life, what will Alix do and who can she trust? **Hidden** deals with prejudice, judgement, courage and the difficulty of sorting right from wrong in a complex world.

In the past few years, with horrendous pictures of drowning refugees on TV, there has been a rising interest in books to help young people understand the issues; **Hidden** took on a whole new lease of life and was often recommended on book lists. The book was published in America, (Holiday House, 2016) and American teens, in the Trump era, emailed me about how the novel inspired them: 'I hope in the future our world will have more tolerance and acceptance to other people around them,' wrote one Muslim student.

As interest in my book rose I met Stuart Mullins, Director/Producer, who has many years of experience making theatre for young audiences. Stuart's work focuses on telling important stories about young people via contemporary theatre. Stuart had read **Hidden** and told me, 'You've got a hot piece of property there, Miriam.'

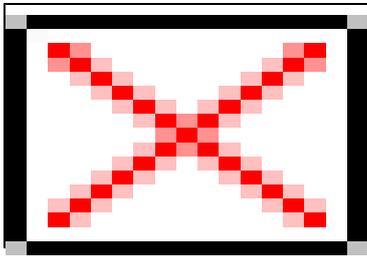
Stuart proposed adapting **Hidden** for three professional actors to tour schools, community centres and small theatres, challenging perceived notions about asylum seekers in the UK today. 'This is not a commercial proposal,' he said, 'This is an educational project.' Rebecca Hayes Laughton, producer, joined the team and playwright Vickie Donoghue (**Mudlarks**) was commissioned to write the script.



It was an exciting time but at the same time, full of anxiety for me. I had to surrender my beloved novel to the playwright and director and then walk away. It felt rather like seeing a child leave home. I spent hours wondering how on earth they would create a 50 minute play out of my 60,000 word novel and what about all my characters? As well as the central characters there's Alix's best friend Kim; Samir's brother; a group of racist bullies; Alix's mum. I found myself muttering in meetings, 'Well. I suppose each actor could play three parts.'

I had a lot to learn about, drama, script writing and the adaptation of a novel. This was a journey I had to go on alone especially when the team told me that the entire play would be set in the hut and take place over one day. I think I experienced almost a sense of shock. I simply couldn't visualise the end product. What if this completely changed my main character, Alix? What if she became unrecognisable, what if I didn't like her any more?

Ultimately the playwright hunkered down to write the script and I focused on my work and waited. Then in March 2017



there was a rehearsed reading at the Old Vic Workrooms. This was the first time I had heard the script and it moved me to tears. I couldn't believe how much detail Vickie Donoghue had included. Vickie had altered the arc of the story to fit one day without compromising my original narrative. She took some of the most important speeches of the book by characters who do not appear in the play and placed them in the mouths of the characters on the stage. I felt that the story had been elevated to an entirely new plane.

The experience has given me a new understanding of the way drama takes the material of a novel and creates a completely new piece. The play compliments my original novel while offering a powerful, authentic experience for a live audience.

An exciting time began for me as I joined Stuart running workshops with young people at the only secondary school on Hayling Island. As they explored the themes in the book of justice and immigration, one twelve year old declared, 'I want to make my own mind up. I don't want anyone telling me what to think.' Stuart and the team have also run workshops in Essex where one Y8 student commented, 'It is an important subject that some people don't want to talk about but I think this play shows what could happen, and different people's opinions. It was amazing!'

All my worries and fears have disappeared and now I can't wait to see the finished play, complete with props and sound effects. I was particularly pleased that Stuart has cast Samir and the asylum seeker, Muhammed, with Arabic speaking actors and that they speak Arabic on the stage, as they do in my book. It adds a dimension and a level of diversity to the play which is very inspiring.

The play is touring from Autumn 2018. There will be opportunities [to book different packages](#) [3] which could include a day in school with workshops, a performance and Q & A afterwards with the cast and producer. Contact Stuart Mullins : stuart@hiddenproject.co.uk [4].

This is going to be a very exciting year as both a new edition of my book (Troika Books) and this wonderful stage adaptation appear. I am hoping to see as many productions as possible!

www.miriamhalahmy.com [5]

Source URL (retrieved on Apr '19): <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/230/childrens-books/articles/hidden-from-page-to-stage>

Links:

- [1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/miriam-halahmy>
- [2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/230>
- [3] <http://www.hiddenproject.co.uk/>
- [4] <mailto:stuart@hiddenproject.co.uk>
- [5] <http://www.miriamhalahmy.com>