



The original set of the play 'In the Middle of the West' when it was first performed in Oklahoma

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Anniversary of American bombing marked with updated play

On 19 April, people from across the American state of Oklahoma will come together to mark the 30th anniversary of the Oklahoma City Bombing – the deadliest act of domestic terrorism in US history.

During remembrance events taking place that week, the 168 people tragically killed in the bombing, as well as the survivors, rescuers, and those whose lives were changed forever that day, will all be remembered.

Among those marking the anniversary will be Northumbria University academic and playwright [Steve Gilroy](#), whose verbatim play – [In the Middle of the West](#) – has become a key tool in teaching young people about the bombing.

Originally written 10 years ago, the play was the first to use a verbatim documentary style to address the bombing, and Steve has now produced an abridged version of the play which will be performed during remembrance events, including at the Oklahoma State Capitol – the first ever performance of this kind at the building, which is the house of government for the state of Oklahoma.



The Oklahoma State Capitol building

In the Middle of the West will also be performed at schools across the State and will coincide with the play and accompanying educational materials being introduced into the official State school curriculum.

Steve is internationally renowned for his expertise in verbatim theatre – a form of documentary theatre which uses the words of real people to tell their stories, allowing real-life experiences to be presented authentically and without dramatic license.

While in the US he will share his unique methodologies with teachers from over 80 Oklahoma schools, with plans for a statewide rollout by the State education department, with the aim of transforming how students engage with the legacy of the bombing and the power of verbatim theatre.

In the Middle of the West was written by Steve using interviews with over 40 people involved in the aftermath of the bombing, which was carried out by US Army veterans Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols and targeted the Alfred P Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

The performance includes testimonies from notable figures such as Jennifer Reynolds, the news anchor who reported on the bombing, and Chris Fields, the firefighter photographed holding a baby – an image which became an iconic symbol of the tragedy of the bombing.

Originally commissioned by [Oklahoma City University](#), the updated version of the play will be shared with school pupils through live performances, as well as streamed online, and through educational workshops led by Steve, which will help them understand the methodology behind his documentary theatre work.

A key element of the project is an extensive evaluation process, set to run for at least two years, which will assess the impact of Steve's unique approach on teaching practices, as well as students' understanding of the bombing's legacy.

The performances will be accompanied by an educational pack, designed to help teachers and students explore the events of the bombing and its aftermath, integrating the play into the Oklahoma state curriculum.

During his trip, Steve will also take part in significant anniversary events, including a performance in the Oklahoma State Capitol Building on Arts and Culture Day on 17 April and the official 30th Anniversary Remembrance Ceremony on 19 April.



Academic and playwright Steve Gilroy

Discussing the importance of the project, Steve said: “When I first accepted the commission to create *In the Middle of the West*, I was unsure about how to approach such a significant and painful event.

“However, by using verbatim theatre, I have been able to bring together diverse voices from across Oklahoma – survivors, first responders, journalists, and community leaders – to tell a story that is not just historical but alive with the emotions and complexities of those who lived through it.

“I am incredibly honoured to be invited to Oklahoma for the 30th anniversary and to work with students who will help tell this story in their own voices.”

The collaboration between Steve and Oklahoma schools marks a new phase of the project, with a focus on engaging students in the storytelling process through verbatim theatre.

Steve has previously worked with schools in the North East of England on similar projects, including [Motherland](#), a play about the experiences of mothers who lost children in Iraq and Afghanistan, and [Each Piece](#), a play about dementia and caregiving.

Through his work, Steve aims to give young people a platform to tell their own stories and develop new ways of understanding and communicating their histories.

He explains: “ This project goes beyond simply recounting events – it empowers students to explore the nuanced legacy of 1995 and equips them with the tools to critically reflect on both the past and the present.

“I’m looking forward to seeing the creativity and energy these students will bring to this process. The educational pack is already sparking incredible ideas among the teachers, and I can’t wait to see how this project evolves.”

Steve Gilroy is Creative Director in [the School of Design, Arts and Creative Industries](#) at Northumbria University and Associate Professor of [Theatre and Performance](#).

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