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COMMON CORE STANDARDS
IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

STANDARDS: Student Matinee performances and pre-show workshops provide unique opportunities for experiential learning and support various combinations of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts. They may also support standards in other subject areas such as Social Studies and History, depending on the individual play’s subject matter.

Activities are also included in this Curriculum Guide and in our pre-show workshops that support several of the Massachusetts state standards in Theatre. Other arts areas may also be addressed depending on the individual play’s subject matter.

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 3

- **Grades 8**: Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

- **Grades 9-10**: Analyze how complex characters (e.g. those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the themes.

- **Grades 11-12**: Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop related elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure 5

- **Grades 8**: Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

- **Grades 9-10**: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks), create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

- **Grades 11-12**: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure 6

- **Grades 8**: Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.

- **Grades 9-10**: Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

- **Grades 11-12**: Analyze a case in which grasping point of view required distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7

- **Grades 8**: Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

- **Grades 9-12**: Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g. recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist).
ACTING

• 1.7 — Create and sustain a believable character throughout a scripted or improvised scene (By the end of Grade 8).

• 1.12 — Describe and analyze, in written and oral form, characters’ wants, needs, objectives, and personality characteristics (By the end of Grade 8).

• 1.13 — In rehearsal and performance situations, perform as a productive and responsible member of an acting ensemble (i.e., demonstrate personal responsibility and commitment to a collaborative process) (By the end of Grade 8).

• 1.14 — Create complex and believable characters through the integration of physical, vocal, and emotional choices (Grades 9-12).

• 1.15 — Demonstrate an understanding of a dramatic work by developing a character analysis (Grades 9-12).

• 1.17 — Demonstrate increased ability to work effectively alone and collaboratively with a partner or in an ensemble (Grades 9-12).

READING AND WRITING SCRIPTS

• 2.7 — Read plays and stories from a variety of cultures and historical periods and identify the characters, setting, plot, theme, and conflict (By the end of Grade 8).

• 2.8 — Improvise characters, dialogue, and actions that focus on the development and resolution of dramatic conflicts (By the end of Grade 8).

• 2.11 — Read plays from a variety of genres and styles; compare and contrast the structure of plays to the structures of other forms of literature (Grades 9-12).

TECHNICAL THEATRE

• 4.6 — Draw renderings, floor plans, and/or build models of sets for a dramatic work and explain choices in using visual elements (line, shape/form, texture, color, space) and visual principals (unity, variety, harmony, balance, rhythm) (By the end of Grade 8).

• 4.13 — Conduct research to inform the design of sets, costumes, sound, and lighting for a dramatic production (Grades 9-12).

CONNECTIONS

• Strand 6: Purposes and Meanings in the Arts — Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings (Grades PreK-12).

• Strand 10: Interdisciplinary Connections — Students will apply their knowledge of the arts to the study of English language arts, foreign languages, health, history and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering (Grades PreK-12).

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Attending live theatre is a unique experience with many valuable educational and social benefits. To ensure that all audience members are able to enjoy the performance, please take a few minutes to discuss the following audience etiquette topics with your students before you come to the Huntington Theatre Company.

• How is attending the theatre similar to and different from going to the movies? What behaviors are and are not appropriate when seeing a play? Why?

• Remind students that because the performance is live, the audience’s behavior and reactions will affect the actors' performances. No two audiences are exactly the same, and therefore no two performances are exactly the same — this is part of what makes theatre so special! Students’ behavior should reflect the level of performance they wish to see.

• Theatre should be an enjoyable experience for the audience. It is absolutely all right to applaud when appropriate and laugh at the funny moments. Talking and calling out during the performance, however, are not allowed. Why might this be? Be sure to mention that not only would the people seated around them be able to hear their conversation, but the actors on stage could hear them, too. Theatres are constructed to carry sound efficiently!

• Any noise or light can be a distraction, so please remind students to make sure their cell phones are turned off (or better yet, left at home or at school!). Texting, photography, and video recording are prohibited. Food, gum, and drinks should not be brought into the theatre.

• Students should sit with their group as seated by the Front of House staff and should not leave their seats once the performance has begun.
GEORGE C. WOLFE

A two-time Tony Award winner, George C. Wolfe is a rare theatrical polymath; he has dominated the fields of playwriting, directing, and theatrical producing. The Colored Museum is his earliest success, premiering in 1986 at a small theatre in New Brunswick, New Jersey before going on to play New York, London, and across the nation on PBS. On the surface, The Colored Museum is a collection of 11 hilarious and biting theatrical “exhibits” of African-American life, stretching from slavery to the present. A young woman’s natural and relaxed wigs argue over who she should wear — for Wolfe the comedy is the vehicle, not the message.

For all its acclaim, Wolfe questions how many people have seen and understood the play’s deepest message. “Nobody’s ever written about [The Colored Museum] the way it should have been written about,” Wolfe said, many years after the play’s success. “It was one of the few plays in the ’80s that was about black people that was set in a contemporary context.” Wolfe was uniquely positioned to see the contradictions and complexities of black life. Born in 1954 in Frankfort, Kentucky, Wolfe grew up in a wholly segregated environment. “Growing up in the time of segregation forced me to develop an inner strength that has served me well. It was a profoundly significant thing in my life, to deny a child access to any place because of the way they look,” Wolfe says. Like Zora Neale Hurston, whose writings Wolfe would later adapt in his acclaimed play Spunk, Wolfe was forged in an all-black environment where his self-esteem blossomed. “I knew I couldn’t go certain places but I knew everywhere I went in my world, I was extraordinary,” Wolfe says. “So therefore when I went into the white world and I had this opposition to me, it injured me but it did not injure my core, because I had 12 years of ‘you are extraordinary.’” Wolfe’s swagger and confidence echoes in The Colored Museum; his frequent advice to the original cast was, “The only thing missing from this play right now is your arrogance.”

At the time of the play’s premiere, his relationship to the material was misinterpreted by many in the African-American community. “When The Colored Museum happened, all these mediocre Negroes who regard themselves as the guardians of black culture attacked me because they thought I was attacking black culture, that I was doing things in front of white people that shouldn’t be done,” Wolfe said in an interview with feminist icon bell hooks. “They didn’t understand my arrogance, my belief that the culture I come from is so strong it can withstand public scrutiny. I don’t see black culture as a fragile thing.”

While black audiences attacked the play when it premiered for trading in stereotypes of black culture, Wolfe sees the play’s artistic value in reclaiming and transforming them. “We have such a knee-jerk response to a silhouette, that if it’s a fat black woman with a bandanna on her head, we say ‘Offensive? Roadblock! Don’t think! Don’t hear what the character’s saying, don’t deal with it,’” Wolfe says. “Because so much of the imagery of the archetype has been co-opted by white culture — and turned into a stereotype — so that we end up throwing out certain symbols and imagery that have a tremendous amount of power and that have a more ancient cultural context to them simply because they’ve been corrupted by white culture.”

The Colored Museum, for all its humor, is filled with what Wolfe calls “pure unadulterated metaphor,” distillations of black experience that he believes are specific and evocative enough to resonate far beyond their time and place. “As a person of color, I was trained from very early on to see ‘Leave it to Beaver,’” “Gilligan’s Island,” or Hamlet and look beyond the specifics of it — whether it was silly white people on an island, or a family living in Nowheres, or a Danish person — to leap past the specifics and find the human truths that have to do with me,” Wolfe says. “I’m interested: is the reverse possible? Can people who are not of color leap past the specifics of who these people are and get inside the dynamic of who they are as individuals?”

BILLY PORTER

Broadway performer Billy Porter is the director of the Huntington Theatre Company’s production of George C. Wolfe’s The Colored Museum. He is the 2013 Tony, Grammy, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Award winner for Best Actor in a Musical for his portrayal of Lola in Kinky Boots (Tony Award for Best Musical). His one-man show Ghetto Superstar (2005 GLAAD Media Award nomination, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette’s Performer of the Year 2003-2004) debuted at The Public Theater in conjunction with City Theatre of Pittsburgh. His directing credits include Company, Letters From ‘Nam, The Wiz, Being Alive, Twilight in Manchego,
Once on this Island (NAACP Theatre Award winner for Best Direction), The Soul of Richard Rodgers, Five Guys Named Moe, Altar Boyz, Rent (Associate Director, Off Broadway revival), Wicked Summer Nights Concert Series (Los Angeles), Patina Miller Live at The Delfonte Room (London), and Signed, Sealed, Delivered: The Music of Stevie Wonder (starring Chaka Khan). His new Broadway album, Billy’s Back on Broadway (Concord Records) was released in April 2014. As a playwright, he was represented Off Broadway with the premiere of While I Yet Live starring S. Epatha Merkerson (Primary Stages). A Pittsburgh native, he received his BFA in drama from Carnegie Mellon University. He is also a graduate of UCLA’s professional program in screenwriting.

“The Colored Museum came into my life at a very formative time,” says Porter. “I was a teenager longing for more than just one type of ‘Black’ representation in the creative storytelling landscape. Wolfe’s unique and irreverent voice of inclusion ignited the fire of possibility inside of me and set me on a creative journey that included stretching myself beyond what, up until then, I thought was possible for a little black gay boy from the ghetto. I am forever grateful.”

QUESTIONS:
1. In his interview with feminist icon bell hooks, Wolfe says critics of The Colored Museum “didn’t understand [his] arrogance.” What does he mean by that? What does it mean to be arrogant? In what way is The Colored Museum the work of an arrogant artist? Which artists today are commonly described as arrogant? Why?
2. As a young man, Porter felt a strong connection to Wolfe’s work. Which artists’ work do you feel a sense of connection to? Which songs, stories, poetry, and visual art depict the world as you see and experience it?
3. Research the theatrical careers of George C. Wolfe and Billy Porter. What other works are they most known for? What common themes exist in the theatre they create?

“GIT ON BOARD”
1. What kinds of images are projected at the start of the play?
2. Describe how Miss Pat addresses the audience. How would you describe her tone and word choice? What are the reminiscent of?
3. What does Miss Pat ask passengers to fasten?
4. According to Miss Pat, what two things are passengers not allowed to do on the Celebrity Slaveship?
5. What problem caused Miss Pat to return to the cabin?
6. According to Miss Pat, what will the passengers’ current pain and suffering bring in the future?
7. What happens to transport the ship through history to the present?
8. What is mixed in with the luggage?

“COOKIN’ WITH AUNT ETHEL”
9. List at least three ingredients Aunt Ethel puts into her pot.
10. What is Aunt Ethel cooking?

“THE PHOTO SESSION”
11. Where does the glamorous couple say that they live?
12. What kind of pain does the couple feel?

“SOLDIER WITH A SECRET”
13. Why did the soldier, Junie Robinson, not feel any pain when he was on fire?
14. What did Junie expect to see when he walked out of the explosion? What did he see instead?
15. What does Junie say either God or the Devil told him about the other soldiers’ futures?

“THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MISS ROJ”
17. According to Miss Roj, who created black people? What did black people create?
18. What is a “Snap Queen”?
19. Why would Miss Roj rather dance his demons out than drink them out? What did Miss Roj do to his father? Why?
20. What happened to the man who insulted Miss Roj at the beach?
21. Why does Miss Roj go to the bar despite hating it there?
22. List at least three reasons Miss Roj gives to snap and dance.
23. What power does Miss Roj have?
“THE HAIRPIECE”
24. Who are Lawanda and Janine?
25. Why does the woman in the towel have no hair?
26. Who is the woman going to lunch with? Why?
27. Why does Janine think she should be the woman’s choice? Why does Lawanda think she should be the woman’s choice?

“THE LAST MAMA-ON-THE-COUCH PLAY”
28. Who is Walter-Lee-Beau-Willie-Jones? Why is his brow heavy?
29. What does Mama want her son to do when he comes in the house?
30. What does Walter-Lee-Beau-Willie-Jones tell Mama he wants?
31. Why does Mama hit her son?
32. What does the Narrator give to Mama for her performance?
33. Who is the Lady in Plaid?
34. What does Walter-Lee-Beau-Willie-Jones want the Lady in Plaid to do?
35. What does the Narrator give to the Lady in Plaid?
36. Who is Medea Jones?
37. According to Medea, why is she behaving as she is?
38. What does the Lady in Plaid give to Medea? Why?
39. According to Walter-Lee-Beau-Willie-Jones, what is this play supposed to be about?
40. How does The Man react to Walter-Lee-Beau-Willie-Jones’s acting?
41. According to Mama, how is her son similar to his own father and grandfather?
42. According to Mama, what never happens in an all-black musical?
43. Why do the performers claim they have to dance?

“SYMBIOSIS”
44. What is the Man throwing into the trash? How does the Kid react?
45. According to the Man, why is he getting rid of these items?
46. What does the Man do to the Kid?
47. According to the Man, when will he be black? Why?

“LALA’S OPENING”
48. Who is Lala Lamazing Grace?
49. Where is Lala originally from?
50. What does Lala have in common with Aretha Franklin?
51. In what country did Lala first become a star?
52. Who is Admonia?
53. Who is Flo’rance? What happened when Flo’rance and Lala came to America?
54. What does Lala do to Flo’rance?
55. Who is Sadie? What does Lala say about her?
56. What story does Lala tell about her mother?
57. According to the second telegram from Lala’s mother, who misses Lala?
58. Who is in the closet?

“PERMUTATIONS”
59. What does Normal Jean Reynolds take out from under her dress?
60. What does Normal Jean hear inside the egg?

‘THE PARTY”
61. How does Topsy behave at parties?
62. According to Topsy, where are her drums?
63. Where does Topsy draw her power from?
THEMES FOR WRITING & DISCUSSION

SATIRE

In his review of the original 1986 Broadway production of The Colored Museum, New York Times theatre critic Frank Rich stated the play’s central question — “How do American Black men and women at once honor and escape the legacy of suffering that is the baggage of their past?” Playwright George C. Wolfe faced this loaded question head-on in his play, embracing its paradoxical nature by creating a work of dramatic art he described as part “exorcism,” part “party,” and wholly satirical. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines satire as “a literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn” and “trenchant wit, irony, or sarcasm meant to expose and discredit vice or folly.” The purpose of satire is to entertain while simultaneously raising awareness by asking oft-ignored questions, presenting stereotypes for examination, and revealing truth and hypocrisy by dabbling in extremes. In The Colored Museum, Wolfe juxtaposes facets of African-American cultural history, both politically correct and not, which results in a biting comedic exploration of what it means to be black in America.

The play’s first vignette, “Git on Board,” provides the satirical basis for the play. The opening moments are dominated by flashing historically accurate images of “African slaves being captured, loaded onto ships, and tortured,” but are immediately followed by a perky flight attendant named Miss Pat, who cheerfully issues the audience a warm welcome “aboard Celebrity Slaveship, departing the gold coast and making short stops at Bahia, Port Au Prince, and Havana, before our final destination of Savannah.” In the guise of flight-safety instructions, Miss Pat sunnily details some of the methods used by white slave-traders to subjugate their human cargo, including bans on drumming or call-and-response singing while onboard. The discomfiting absurdist humor of the piece most fully emerges when she tells the passengers that “the songs [they] are going to sing in the cotton fields, under the burning heat and stinging lash, will metamorphose and give birth to the likes of James Brown and the fabulous Flames.” Blacks will also “come up with some of the best dances,” she further explains. “The Watusi! The Funky Chicken!” But as Miss Pat points out, these famous contributions to black culture came at a price, as the audience was so glaringly reminded in the vignette’s opening moments: “All right, so you’re gonna have to suffer for a few hundred years,” she remarks, “but from your pain will come a culture so complex.” This is the central premise of Wolfe’s satire in The Colored Museum. Black culture’s most beloved and celebrated facets would not be possible without the horrors and indignities in the history that came before.

“Any baggage you don’t claim, we trash,” Miss Pat warns meaningfully at the end of the Celebrity Slaveship flight, conjuring the audience’s memories of lost suitcases forgotten in overhead bins. Later in the play, however, the baggage-metaphor of “Git on Board” becomes more evocative — and literal — in the vignette, “Symbiosis.” The opening stage directions describe “a Black Man in corporate dress standing before a large trash can throwing objects from a Saks Fifth Avenue bag into it.” These objects are relics of the Man’s 1960s youth, which he now disavows. The Kid, the other character in the vignette, represents the Man’s younger self. The Kid is hilariously horrified by the Man’s shocking decision to dispose of his first pair of Converse All-stars, his first Afro-comb, and copies of the Jackson Five’s “I Want You Back” and the Temptations’ Greatest Hits. But the Man claims that this ritual purge is vitally important. “My survival depends on it,” he explains. “The climate is changing and either you adjust or you end up extinct . . . King Kong would have made it to the top if only he had taken the elevator. Instead he brought attention to his struggle and ended up dead.” The struggle between the Man and the Kid is punctuated by witty humor, including the Kid’s reasoning that “I Want You Back” must be preserved because “it’s living proof Michael [Jackson] had a Black nose,” making this vignette an especially sharp satire of those who prioritize assimilation into white culture at the sacrifice of their own “Blackness.” “I have no history. I have no past,” the Man confesses. In order to meet society’s expectations, the Man must distance himself from the emotional baggage of his identity. “I must be able to smile on cue. And watch the news with an impersonal eye. I have no stake in the madness. Being Black is too emotionally taxing,” he quips. “Therefore I will be Black only on weekends and holidays.” The Man has decided that he will not claim the baggage Miss Pat alluded to as his own. In order to survive, he will instead trash his cultural past.

The play’s final vignette, “The Party,” seeks to make sense of the other stories’ baggage claims and rejections. The opening stage directions describe the vignette’s central character, Topsy Washington, a young woman whose “hair and dress are a series of stylistic contradictions which are hip, Black, and unencumbered.” Topsy tells the audience about a huge blowout party she imagined, describing it as “the largest gathering of Black/Negro/colored Americans you’d ever want to see.” These men and women come from all periods of black American history, from the worlds of music, art, politics, sports, and pop culture, leading to unique moments of cultural dialogue. “Bert Williams and Malcolm X was discussing existentialism as it relates to the shuffle-ball change,” Topsy says. “Aunt Jemima and Angela Davis was in the kitchen...
sharing a plate of greens and just goin’ off about South Africa.”

Though the absurdity of these combinations of black cultural and historical figures draws laughter, Topsy looks beyond the novelty of their imaginary conversations and makes them personally significant. The people in Topsy’s party were “dancing to the rhythm of one beat. Dancing to the rhythm of their own definition. Celebrating their cultural madness.” Topsy admits there was once a time when she would “jump into a rage any time anybody tried to deny who I was, now all I got to do is give attitude, quicker than light, and then go on about the business of being me. ‘Cause I’m dancing to the music of the madness in me.”

What happens when black Americans embrace and recognize their cultural history? And what is the impact when they deny it? While the Man of Symbiosis represents those who trash their own heritage in order to fit in, Topsy embraces all aspects of being black with the specific objective of standing out — an objective that she leads the entire cast of *The Colored Museum* to declare —

TOPSY: My power is in my…

EVERYONE: Madness!

TOPSY: And my colored contradictions.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. How is *The Colored Museum* both a party and an exorcism? Can these descriptors be applied to satire in general? Why or why not?

2. Contrast the slideshow visuals at the beginning of “Git on Board” with the tone of Miss Pat’s speech. How does this juxtaposition affect you as an audience member? What does the playwright want the audience to think about, both in this vignette and in the play as a whole?

3. Satirists are sometimes condemned for pushing the limits of their humor too far, prompting critics to ask whether anything is sacred.

a. George C. Wolfe received this type of criticism for *The Colored Museum*, which includes “The Last Mama-on-the-Couch Play,” a satire of Lorraine Hansberry’s landmark play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. Read the article in this curriculum guide about black theatre on page xx and then reexamine “The Last Mama-on-the-Couch Play.” What cultural or historical baggage is being claimed or trashed through satire in this vignette? When the Narrator claims that the piece is “a searing domestic drama that tears at the very fabric of racist America” and describes central character Walter-Lee-Beau-Wille-Jones as a man whose “brow is heavy with 300 years of oppression,” what is Wolfe saying about Hansberry’s play and others like it?

b. Are there some subject matters that should never be mocked? Or should all topics be fair game?

4. Two of today’s most popular satirists are Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele, whose sketch-comedy television show, “Key & Peele,” airs on Comedy Central. In an op-ed they co-authored in *Time* magazine in March 2014, Key and Peele say that the purpose of humor is “to help people cope with the fears and horrors of the world:”

When a humorist makes the conscious decision to exclude a group from derision, isn’t he or she implying that the members of that group are not capable of self-reflection? Or don’t possess the mental faculties to recognize the nuances of satire? A group that’s excluded never gets the opportunity to join in the greater human conversation . . . But ask yourself again what’s worse: making fun of people or assuming that they’re too weak to take it?

Compare and contrast the “Key & Peele” television series with *The Colored Museum*. How are they similar and different in terms of structure, subject matter, and audience? What do you believe is worse — making fun of people or assuming that they’re too weak to take it?
IDENTITY

Who are we? How does our history impact our identity? How do we decide what pieces of our lives we will take with us in the future? Understanding one’s own identity as a human being is a journey towards a meaningful life. George C. Wolfe explores the journey of self-identification through the exhibits of The Colored Museum, which show both African-American history and the impact of African culture within America. With its use of satire and dark comedy, The Colored Museum exposes the audience to a different look into the identity crisis that people of African descent might struggle with. Director and Tony Award-winning actor Billy Porter speaks in personal terms to the struggle of identity and how The Colored Museum sheds light to a common sensation everyone can relate to. “George Wolfe’s unique and irreverent voice of inclusion ignited the fire of possibility inside of me,” says Porter. “It set me on a creative journey that included stretching myself beyond what, up until then, I thought was possible for a little black gay boy from the ghetto. I am forever grateful.”

In the book The Souls of Black Folk, W.E.B. DuBois speaks to the struggle of identity African-Americans face. He coins the term “Double Consciousness,” which is the idea that African-Americans exist with a sense of two identities that must coexist — one American and one African. The Colored Museum presents several characters who struggle to understand their identities and to find a balance in this twoness that DuBois describes. The exhibit “Symbiosis” depicts an African-American man’s struggle with his identity. In this scene, the central character, a black man in a business suit, is throwing out items that are representations of black culture. It is through these items that he expressed his black identity and by throwing them in the trash, he symbolically rejects his black culture and chooses to align himself with his American side. His decision reflects the pressure to assimilate with what the dominant white culture dictates. Anything that does not fit into that prescribed American identity is to be discarded.

Hair has always been an important, but often controversial, element of African-American identity. Wolfe explores the hair debate in the vignette “The Hairpiece,” in which a black woman struggles to decide between wearing an Afro wig or a long flowing wig. The wigs come to life and analyze the cultural connotations they each represent, and argue over which wig the woman should wear. The Afro wig, Janine, and the long flowing wig, Lawanda, draw on common stereotypes of black women to deter the Woman from picking the other. The Woman feels torn in both directions, and her indecision reflects a conflict many black women face. Lawanda characterizes the African-American woman who is trying to assimilate into white American culture by straightening her hair. Janine, on the other hand, symbolizes the black women empowerment movement by having her hair in its natural state. Angela Davis a political activist and former member of the Black Panther Party and many other women of her generation were known forwearing their hair in an afro as a symbol of solidarity and Black Power. On the other hand, long, straight hair became popular due to the heavy influence of European fashion and models. Janine and Lawanda both make references to the symbolism of each other’s style.

QUESTIONS:
1. Why do you think the playwright decided to name the hair vignette “The Hairpiece” rather than “Wig Talk” or something else? What does the title have to do with identity?
2. The characters in “Symbiosis” and “The Hairpiece” believe the things they wear and how they look directly represent their character and culture. How do you think your character and culture is perceived by your clothes and your appearance?
3. What factors do you consider to be a part of your identity? How much of your identity is influenced by others and the media?

CULTURAL HISTORY

Time affects us all differently. It impacts the decisions we make and the people we grow into. History and culture go hand in hand in this process, which is why playwright George C. Wolfe uses the metaphor of a museum to portray the historical journey of the African-American community. Through this metaphor, Wolfe is able to take the audience on a museum tour in which the exhibits depict history’s effects on African-Americans, as well as how it has defined contemporary black culture.

The play’s first exhibit, “Git on Board,” takes the audience to the beginning of African-American history and culture: slavery. The
beneath a harsh, unforgiving sky. The sun, a relentless force, beats down on the land, its heat searing everything in its path.

Yet, despite the harshness of the environment, the land remains resilient. Its spirit, etched into the soil and the rocks, is a testament to the endurance of life itself. Even in the face of adversity, these creatures find ways to adapt and thrive, their existence a constant reminder of the beauty and complexity of the natural world.

As the evening approaches, the sky takes on a deeper hue, the colors of the setting sun painting the horizon in shades of orange and gold. The world slows down, and nature prepares for the night that is to come. The day has been long, but the cycle of life continues, unbroken and eternal.
SLAVE SHIPS

In the opening scene of *The Colored Museum*, we arrive aboard the Celebrity Slaveship, a glamorous flight that takes the audience through the middle passage to Savannah, Georgia. Miss Pat, the flight attendant, explains to the passengers that there are rules and safety regulations they must follow in order to have a safe and pleasant ride, including refraining “from call and response singing between cabins as that sort of thing can lead to rebellion.” Miss Pat’s warning of rebellion harkens back to the slave catchers purposely separating slaves that may have come from the same tribes and punishing those who tried to rebel. Slave catchers and plantation owners would punish black slaves for drumming and call and response because it could be used to convey messages and signals, or inspire insurrection.

Wolfe uses the Celebrity Slaveship as a metaphor to satirize the conditions of the slave ships and the treatment of slaves. “Git On Board” is a comedic vignette, but it alludes to the atrocious reality aboard slave ships. Slaves were tightly packed into the ships and due to the excessive amount of people, many slaves were forced to spend the duration of the journey either laying or crouching down, while being shackled in place. In “Git On Board,” Miss Pat frequently reminds passengers to keep their shackles on, emphasizing the fact that slaves were not given any opportunity to not be shackled on the voyage except when their captors unshackled them. Men were normally kept below deck while women and children were placed into other quarters which gave them the ability to move around more, but also made them easier targets for acts of violence and sexual abuse. Miss Pat goes on to talk about separation through references to “Cabin A” and “coach,” in keeping with the metaphor of the Celebrity Slaveship.

As the journey through the middle passage continues, Miss Pat notices that some coach passengers are engaging in some acts of rebellion. Miss Pat tries to calm down the passengers and reminds them that “Celebrity has no intention of throwing you overboard and collecting insurance.” Though Miss Pat and the crew members of the Celebrity Slaveship value their “customers,” slave catchers had a different view of the value of their human cargo. The lack of sanitation led to the rapid spread of disease aboard the ships. Fever, dysentery, and small pox were common diseases that affected slaves. They were fed twice a day and those who did not want to eat were force fed. Slaves who died along the journey were simply thrown overboard.

QUESTIONS:
1. What would have happened if the slave catchers placed male, female, and child slaves all in the same area of the ship?
2. What do you think it would feel like to be a captive, stolen from your home.
3. Why do you think Wolfe used an airplane as a metaphor for slave ships? Is it an effective metaphor? Why or why not?
4. Why does Miss Pat remind the audience about the importance of not rebelling?
5. What does Miss Pat represent in the Celebrity Slaveship compared to the actual journey through the middle passage?

BLACK SOLDIERS AND THE UNITED STATES MILITARY

MISS PAT: On your right you will see the American Revolution, which will give the U.S. of A exclusive rights to your life. And on your left, the Civil War, which means you will vote Republican until F.D.R. comes along . . . Ahhhhhhhhh! That was World War I, which is not to be confused with World War II . . . Ahhhhh! Which is not to be confused with the Korean War or the Vietnam War, all of which you will play a major role in.

As Miss Pat explains early in *The Colored Museum*, black Americans have fought in all of America’s wars, even those in which they were not actually considered Americans citizens. In the vignette “Soldier with a Secret,” George C. Wolfe steps away from the comedy that dominates some of the other exhibits and enters a darker dramatic space. There he draws attention to an often overlooked figure, the black soldier, and the consequences of war that are unique to their military experience. Throughout American history, black soldiers were assigned to segregated units which received inadequate supplies and food rations, but in “Soldier with a Secret,” Junie Robinson’s concerns are squarely fixed on the future.

Already dead, Junie has looked into the future and seen what awaits his friends when they return home from war. Post-traumatic stress disorder and run-ins with law enforcement are only the beginning. “I saw how J.F., once he got back to Chicago, was gonna get shot dead by the police,” Junie explains. “And I saw how Hubert was gonna start beatin’ on his old lady which I didn’t understand, ‘cause all he could do was talk on and on about how
much he loved her. Each and every one of ‘em had pain in his future and blood on his path. And God or the Devil, one spoke to me and said ‘Junie, these colored boys ain’t gonna be the same after this war. They ain’t gonna have no kind of happiness.’” This knowledge weighs heavily on Junie, leading him to make a gut-wrenching decision about whether he can, in good conscience, allow the men with whom he served to survive the war — only to be forgotten or worse when they return home.

While men like Junie, J.F., and Hubert fought and died in Vietnam, the anti-war movement grew in strength back in the United States. Many civil rights activists were also anti-war activists, drawing attention to the hypocrisy of fighting a war to secure freedom and rights for people on the other side of the world when the US’s own citizens of color were not free themselves. On July 28, 1965, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party issued its Petition Against the War in Vietnam, in which they outlined “five reasons why Negroes should not be in any war fighting for America.” On January 6, 1966, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee released its Petition Paper on Vietnam, in which they drew stark parallels between the adversity faced by blacks in the American South and the oppression of the Vietnamese people:

“We ourselves have often been victims of violence and confinement executed by US government officials. We call the numerous persons who have been murdered in the South because of their efforts to secure their civil and human rights, and whose murderers have been allowed to escape penalty for their crimes. The murder of [black college student] Samuel Younge in Tuskegee, Alabama, is no different than the murder of people in Vietnam, for both Younge and the Vietnamese sought and are seeking to secure the rights guaranteed them by law. In each case, the US government bears a great part of the responsibility for these deaths.”

Despite urges from some civil rights leaders to remain silent on the topic, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., also spoke out against the United States intervention in Vietnam. He believed that the issues of economic justice, racism, war, and militarism were closely connected. Families of color, he noted, were “sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem.” He saw a distinctly cruel irony in the fact that the American people had “been repeatedly faced with . . . watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools.” It was in this context that Junie Robinson and his fellow soldiers were drafted to serve, and these injustices awaited them when they returned home after experiencing the horrors of war.

QUESTIONS:

1. How is the tone of “Soldier with a Secret” different from the other vignettes in The Colored Museum? Why do you think playwright George C. Wolfe decided to shift gears in this piece? How does this tonal shift impact the development of the play’s central themes and ideas?

2. Did Junie Robinson actually die and come back to life? Or does he just think he did? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

3. What is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)? What are its symptoms? How was it diagnosed and treated following the Vietnam War? How is PTSD diagnosed and treated today? What other challenges did Vietnam War veterans face when they returned home from the war?

4. Research and read the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’s Petition Against the War in Vietnam and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s Position Paper on Vietnam.

a. What role did these groups play in the anti-war movement?

b. What arguments did they make against black participation in the Vietnam War? What did they believe the US government should specifically be doing rather than waging war overseas?

5. Read the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Beyond Vietnam” speech. Compare and contrast it with the other documents in regard to both form and content. How was the speech received by King’s supporters and detractors?

MEDIA — EBONY AND JET MAGAZINE

The exhibit “The Photo Session,” depicts a photo shoot with “a very glamorous, gorgeous black couple wearing the best of everything and perfect smiles.” The couple emulates black celebrities in Ebony magazine, which was founded by John H. Johnson in 1945. Johnson was born in Arkansas City, Arkansas and moved to Chicago in the 1930s. After Johnson finished his studies in Chicago at Northwestern University, he developed The Negro Digest in 1942, which became the prototype for Ebony.

Wolfe uses the characters to portray the affect media has on black celebrities and how it stifles their opinions on social issues while presenting a polished, superficial image.

GIRL: Yes we live inside a world where everyone is beautiful, and wears fabulous clothes

GUY: And no one says anything profound.

GIRL: Or meaningful
GUY: Or contradictory
GIRL: Because no one talks. Everyone just smiles and shows off their cheekbones. Last month I was black and fabulous while holding up a bottle of vodka. This month we get to be black and fabulous together.

In this vignette, Wolfe explores the view that in the media, celebrities are less likely to speak out and express themselves and are primarily focused on their appearance. “At times it feels like we’re suffocating, like we’re not human anymore,” says the “The Photo Session.” The characters go on to explain that their choice of fame and glamour came with the desire to not deal with the issues of the world.

GUY: So if the world is becoming too much for you, do like we did.
GIRL: Give away your life and come be beautiful with us.

QUESTIONS:
1. In “The Photo Session,” a character mentions that they decided to become famous because of the pain they felt going on in the world. What do you think is the “pain” that the characters are referencing? Why do Girl and Guy think fame is a solution to this “pain”?
2. Describe how the media portrays the lives of black celebrities. How closely does that portrayal match the reality?
3. Is this a fair representation of the Black media and Ebony magazine?

“SYMBIOSIS”
The Colored Museum trades in images we’ve all seen before, playing with stereotypes, tropes, and icons often at once familiar and inflammatory. Its satire mines for meaning in the visual and material culture of 20th century African-American. In the exhibit “Symbiosis,” a black businessman throws out souvenirs of his late 1960s youth. His collection of Black Power buttons clatter into the trash can, but even personal and pop cultural artifacts carry the political; for him, Afro-sheen is black experience, pressurized into an aerosol can. By discarding these relics, he renounces history to accommodate the comforts of corporate culture and sate the appetite of assimilation. It’s a matter of survival, he claims: “the climate is changing, Kid, and either you adjust or you end up extinct. A sociological dinosaur.”

The items the Man throws into the trash can include:

- **Converse All-stars:** Sneakers also known as Chuck Taylors, or “Chucks,” were originally footwear for professional basketball players, but became popular athletic shoes in the 1960s and an off-the-court symbol of youth and rebellion.
- **Afro-comb:** Sometimes called a pick, it is an upright comb with long teeth. Throughout history, wearing a comb as an accessory to an Afro hairstyle has been a form of political protest and stance against oppression.
- **Dashiki:** A colorful, ornate, detailed men’s shirt with origins in West Africa. They became a symbol of cultural pride, particularly for those involved in the Black Power movement of the 1960s.
- **Autographed Photos of:**
  - **Stokely Carmichael:** A civil rights activist of the 1960s who was a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, served as Honorary Prime Minister of the Black Panther Party, and was a leader of the All-African Peoples’ Revolutionary Party.
  - **Jomo Kenyatta:** The first prime minister of Kenya following its independence from Great Britain in 1963, having previously been imprisoned and exiled for inciting and leading anti-colonialist movements.
  - **Donna Summer:** A Boston-born singer and songwriter. Known as the Queen of Disco, her hits include “Love to Love You Baby,” “Last Dance,” and “Bad Girls.”
- **Murray’s Pomade:** A waxy hairstyling product invented by C.D. Murray, an African-American barber from Chicago. Murray designed his pomade to help African-American men achieve a wave hairstyle.
- **Afro-sheen:** A hairspray formulated to give a glossy, shiny finish to Afro hairstyles.
- **Curl relaxer:** A chemical hair product used to straighten the texture of African-American hair, leaving it smooth and straight.
- **Soul on Ice by Eldridge Cleaver:** A memoir and essay collection written by Cleaver while he served time in Folsom State Prison for sexual assault and selling marijuana. Cleaver earned his high school diploma while in prison; where he read works by socio-political philosophers including Machiavelli, Lenin, Malcolm X, and W.E.B. DuBois. As a result, Cleaver became a strong adherent to the philosophies of Malcolm X and Karl Marx. He recounts this transformation and describes his views on his “identification as a black soul which has been colonized” in Soul on Ice.
- **“Purple Haze”:** The second single recorded by The Jimi Hendrix Experience. Released in 1967, the song introduced Hendrix’s psychedelic rock sound. Hendrix described “Purple Haze” as a love song, but ambiguity in the lyrics led listeners to interpret the song as describing a psychedelic experience.
• “There’s a Riot Goin’ On”: The fifth studio album by Sly and the Family Stone, released in 1971. It introduced a darker element into the group’s funk-soul sound. The title was intended as a response to “What’s Going On,” a recently released song and album by Marvin Gaye.

• “I Want You Back”: A single from The Jackson 5’s 1969 debut album, Diana Ross Presents The Jackson 5. The song’s lead vocal was performed by Michael Jackson, who was then only 11 years old.

• “Fingertips Part 2”: A 1963 song by Stevie Wonder. “Part 2” was the b-side of the record and served as an encore of “Fingertips Part 1.”

• “The Temptations Greatest Hits”: Released in 1966, the album included the influential R&B group’s songs, “The Way You Do the Thing You Do,” “Since I Lost My Baby,” and their #1 hit, “My Girl.”

• The man discards several political buttons including:
  Free Angela: Angela Davis is a civil rights activist from Birmingham, Alabama, who was a leader of the Communist Party USA and worked closely with the Black Panther Party. She was arrested in 1970 when an African-American high school student named Jonathan Jackson used guns she owned to take hostages in a California courtroom. A hostage was killed in the ensuing fire-fight with police. Although she was not directly involved in the incident, Davis was charged under California law with aggravated kidnapping and first degree murder in the hostage’s death. She appeared on the FBI’s Ten Most-Wanted Fugitive List before being taken into custody. The Black People in Defense of Angela Davis committee was formed in New York City with the purpose of freeing Davis from jail and more than 200 like-minded committees eventually formed across the country. An all-white jury later acquitted Davis.

  Free Bobby: Robert “Bobby” Seale co-founded the Black Panther Party with Huey Newton. The two met through the Afro-American Association at Merritt College. Strongly influenced by the philosophies of Malcolm X, Seale and Newton founded the Black Panther Party using the late activist’s slogan, “Freedom by any means necessary,” including violence. As the chairman of the Black Panthers, Seale stated that the Party was “an organization that represents black people and many white radicals related to this and understand that the Black Panther Party is a righteous revolutionary front against this racist, decadent, capitalistic system.” Seale was imprisoned in 1968. One of the Chicago 8, he was convicted of conspiracy and inciting a riot following that year’s Democratic National Convention held in Chicago.

QUESTIONS:

1. What does it mean to “assimilate?” Why does the Man feel he must assimilate into the dominant white culture? What does the Man mean when he tells the Kid “either you adjust or you end up extinct”? What does this have to do with symbiosis, the scientific concept the vignette is named for?

2. How have black art, fashion, music, and other cultural trends influenced American culture as a whole? Compare and contrast this process with the Man’s assimilation into white culture in “Symbiosis.”

3. The Kid is offended by the Man’s revelation that The Color Purple by Alice Walker has replaced Eldridge Cleaver’s Soul on Ice on his bookshelf. Why might this be?

4. What is the significance of the Man’s killing of the Kid and putting him into the trash can at the end of the vignette?

5. In April 2014, model and reality television star Kendall Jenner received attention on social media for wearing her hair partially braided in cornrows, a fashion choice Marie Claire magazine described on Twitter as “taking bold braids to a new epic level.” The ensuing debate spawned the hashtag #EpicBraidLevels, as black Twitter users attacked the magazine over its ascribing credit for a hairstyle worn by blacks for centuries to a white woman in 2014.

a. What is cultural appropriation? How is it different from cultural appreciation and cultural exchange? Were Kendall Jenner’s braids an example of cultural appropriation? Was the way Marie Claire discussed her braids problematic?

b. Look up #EpicBraidLevels on Twitter. Describe the commentary on both sides of the discussion. How did Marie Claire respond to criticism of its statement?
A TIMELINE OF BLACK THEATRE

• **1842-1843** Songwriter Daniel Decatur creates the first singing and dancing show while in blackface. Calling themselves the Virginia Minstrels, they first premiered in February 1843 in a New York City theatre. A minstrel show was comprised of three parts: the first part was a walkaround — the company marched onto the stage singing and dancing, also known as a cakewalk. The cakewalk derived from slaves on the plantation making fun of their masters’ walk. The second part is called the Olio. This part of the show consisted of a variety of talents from the ensemble that included singing, dancing, comedy acts, and parodies of theatre. The final act depicted life on the plantation, based off of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe. The characters created through these minstrel shows became iconic images and representations of African-Americans.

• **1850** William Henry Lane, also known as Master Juba, becomes the first African-American to perform for white audiences. It is believed that Master Juba created tap dancing.

• **1850** Ten theatres in New York City begin to only produce minstrel shows.

• **1870** Minstrel shows begin to decline due to the end of the Civil War.

• **1898** *Clorindy: The Origin of the Cakewalk* premieres as the first Broadway musical with an all-black cast.

• **1918-1920** The Harlem Renaissance, a literary, artistic, and intellectual movement, begins after World War I.

• **1920** Angelina W. Grimke writes *Blessed are the Barren, Rachel* and becomes the first African-American to publish a play. It was one of the first plays that protested against racial violence.

• **1921** The musical, *Shuffle Along*, written by Noble Sissle and Eubig Blake, had an all-black cast and featured the hit song, “I’m Just Wild about Harry.” It premiered in Washington, D.C. and had a successful Broadway run, the first black musical to do so.

• **1924** *Appearances* by Garland Anderson opens on Broadway as the first full-length drama written by an African-American. The play tells the story of a black boy being accused of raping a white woman.

• **1935** *Mulatto*, also known as *A Play of the Deep South*, by Langston Hughes premieres on Broadway. The play tells the story of Robert, a lighter-skinned slave, whose father is the slave master. Robert must deal with the rejection of his father and the racial discrimination associated with being a lighter-skinned black man.

• **1935-1939** The Federal Theatre Project is formed by the government during the Great Depression to create more jobs. FTP became the main source of training for African-American performers. It also employed and taught many African-Americans about lighting, sound, and other technical aspects of theatre. FTP produced many shows written by African-American playwrights and other classics while using an all-black casts. William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* was directed by Orson Wells in conjunction with FTP and included an all-black cast set in Haiti.

• **1940** The American Negro Theater (ANT) is founded by Fredrick O’Neil and Abram Hill. ANT produced 19 plays — 12 of them were original works by ensemble members. Their productions were geared towards the Harlem community, which is where the ensemble was founded. The company shut down in 1949.

• **1940** Theodore Ward co-founds the Negro Playwrights Company and produces the play *Big White Fog*.

• **1950** Juanita Hall becomes the first African-American to win a Tony Award for her performance in *South Pacific* as Bloody Mary. She went on to do 2,000 performances and was one of the few original cast members to be in the movie adaptation.

• **1954** Harry Belafonte wins the Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical in John Murray Anderson’s *Almanac*.

• **1959** *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry and directed by Lloyd Richards premieres on Broadway. The play tells the story of a lower middle class family who inherits $10,000 from their insurance plan and must decide whether or not to move to an all-white community. It was the first play to be produced on Broadway by a black woman and directed by a black man. The New York Drama Critics named it the best play in 1959.

• **1960** *A Raisin in the Sun* becomes the first African-American play to be nominated for four Tony Awards — Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Direction, and Best Play.

• **1962** Diahann Carrol wins the Tony Award for Best Actress in Musical for her performance in *No Strings*.

• **1967** The Negro Ensemble Company is founded by two African-American actors — Robert Hooks and Douglas Turner Ward. Both men were a part of the *A Raisin in the Sun* road tour. The Negro Ensemble
Company has produced more than 200 new plays and employed more than 4,000 actors and crew members.

1969 - James Earl Jones wins his first Tony Award for Best Actor for his performance as Jack Johnson, the first African-American heavy weight, in The Great White Hope.

1970 New Federal Theatre is founded by Woodie King Jr. in the Lower East Side of New York City. New Federal Theatre focuses on theatrical work made and created by people of color. The theatre continues to provide multi-ethnic theatrical experiences.

1970 Charles Gordon becomes the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his play No Place to be Somebody. The play tells the story of a black bartender in the civil rights era who tries to outsmart a white mobster.

1973 Ben Vereen wins the Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical as the Leading Player in Pippin.

1978 Nell Carter wins the Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in Ain't Misbehavin'.

1981 Hinton Battle wins his first of three Tony Awards for his role in Sophisticated Ladies.

1982 Charles Fuller receives the Pulitzer Prize for Best Drama for A Soldier's Play. The play explores the complicated feelings of anger and resentment that African-American soldiers from different class, educational, and geographical backgrounds have toward one another.

1982 Jennifer Holliday wins the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical for her iconic and legendary portrayal of Effie White in Dreamgirls.

1984 August Wilson's first play, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom premieres on Broadway, winning the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best American Play.

1986 The Colored Museum by George C. Wolfe premiers Off Broadway.

1987 Fences by August Wilson is the first of the Century Cycle plays to premiere at Yale Repertory Theatre. Wilson went on to win his first of two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama with Fences and took home the Tony Award for Best Play that same year.

1990-1992 Tyler Perry, at the age of 22, produces I Know I've Been Changed in Atlanta. The play depicts themes of Christianity and forgiveness while addressing issues of child abuse and family.

1990 August Wilson wins his second Pulitzer Prize for Drama with The Piano Lesson.

1990 Suzan Lori Parks publishes the play The Death of the Last Man in the Whole Entire World. The play focuses on stereotypes of African-Americans.

1992 Gregory Hines wins the Tony Award for Best Actor in his portrayal of jazz pioneer Jelly Roll Morton in Jelly's Last Jam.

1992 Laurence Fishburne wins a Tony Award for his performance in August Wilson's Two Trains Running.

1993 George C. Wolfe wins the Tony Award for Best Director for Angels in America: Millennium Approaches, the critically acclaimed play by Tony Kushner. He also becomes the artistic director of The Public Theater in New York City.

1993 Jeffry Wright wins the Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in Angels America: Millennium Approaches.

1994 Audra McDonald wins her first Tony Award for her performance in Carousel. McDonald is the only actor to win six Tony Awards and is the first person to win a Tony Award in all four acting categories.

2002 Suzan-Lori Parks wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for Topdog/Underdog.

2002 Kenny Leon and Jane Bishop co-founded True Colors Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia. True Colors Theatre founded the August Wilson Monologue Competition, which celebrates the great work of August Wilson with high school students from Los Angeles, New York City, Atlanta, Chicago, Boston, Pittsburgh, Portland, and Seattle.

2004 Anika Noni Rose wins the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical for her performance in Caroline, or Change.

2004 A Raisin in the Sun is revived on Broadway and wins two Tony Awards. Phylicia Rashad from “The Cosby Show” wins the Tony Award for Best Actress and Audra McDonald wins the Tony Award for Best Featured Actress.

2008 The Hip Hop Shakespeare Company in London is founded by MOBO Award-winning hip hop artist Akala. The company uses hip hop music to help students understand Shakespearean language.

2009 Lynn Nottage wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for Ruined, which tells the story of women in Congo and the sexual and physical abuse they have encountered in their communities.

2010 Denzel Washington and Viola Davis win the Tony Awards for Best Actor and Best Actress in the revival of Fences as Troy and Rose Maxon.

2014 A Raisin in a Sun is revived on Broadway and wins three Tony Awards — Best Direction to Kenny Leon, Best Featured Actress in a Play to Sophie Okonedo, and Best Revival of a Play.
PERFORMING IDENTITY 1: THE “I AM” POEM

Several of the exhibits in The Colored Museum involve characters who speak about themselves and their identities through monologues. In this exercise, students should fill in the blanks to create a personal poetic statement. It could rhyme, but it does not have to. Volunteers share their poems with the class.

I Am ____________________________  (student’s name)

I am ____________________________

I wonder _________________________

I hear ___________________________

I see _____________________________

I want __________________________

I am _____________________________

I pretend _________________________

I feel ____________________________

I touch __________________________

I worry __________________________

I cry _____________________________

I am _____________________________

I understand _____________________

I say _____________________________

I dream __________________________

I try ______________________________

I hope ____________________________

I am _____________________________

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES
PERFORMING IDENTITY 2: CULTURE AND HOME

Think about the place you call home and your ethnic background. What sights, sounds, tastes, and smells are evocative of your home? Create a poem that uses all five senses to describe the culture you belong to. Begin by filling in the following prompts with as many specifics and details as possible. Then compose the lists you’ve made into a five-line poem that may or may not rhyme but that includes all of your descriptions. Add a sixth line that sums up what this place means to you.

Home...

• Looks like

• Feels like

• Sounds like

• Smells like

• Tastes like

•

•

•

•

•

•

•
PROJECTION DESIGN

Projections play a major role in *The Colored Museum* — several of the vignettes, including “Git On Board” and “Soldier with a Secret,” begin with projected images that provide historical context for what is about to happen onstage. Choose two or more vignettes from the play and create a Power Point slide show of images of historical events connected with the focus of that vignette. Include images that should precede the action onstage and images that could inform setting (both time and place) in lieu of physical set pieces during the performance.

PERFORMING CULTURE

Throughout *The Colored Museum* we see many different depictions of culture within the African-American community and notice how perception can come into play. Break students up into groups; ask them to list three to four components of culture that they think are important. Each group should create a tableau (a frozen image that tells a story) that represents each of their ideas about culture and then share the tableaus with the class. Ask students to observe the tableaus and determine what components of their culture each group selected and what they see in the tableaus that led them to that answer. After all the groups have shown their tableaus, discuss with students their reasoning for choosing each component.

MY HISTORICAL CULTURE

George C. Wolfe challenges his audience through the exhibits in *The Colored Museum* to consider the impact history has on culture and what it has taught the world to accept as reality. Using the worksheet on page 21, have students fill in six different traditions or important cultural parts of their family and the history behind each one.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

**Literature and Poetry**
- *I know why the caged bird sings* by Maya Angelou
- *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* by Langston Hughes
- *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison
- *PUSH* by Sapphire
- *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker
- *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jaqueline Woodson
- *Black Boy* by Richard Wright

**Drama**
- *Dutchman* by Amiri Baraka
- *The Bluest Eye* adapted by Lydia R. Diamond, from the novel by Toni Morrison
- *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry
- *Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris
- *Ruined* by Lynn Nottage
- *Topdog/Underdog* by Suzan-Lori Parks
- The Century Cycle plays by August Wilson
- *Jelly’s Last Jam* by George C. Wolfe and Susan Birkenhead
- *Spunk* adapted by George C. Wolfe, from stories by Zora Neale Hurston
- *A Soldier’s Play* by Charles Fuller

**Autobiography, Biography, and Philosophy**
- *Soul on Ice* by Eldridge Cleaver
- *Post-Soul Satire: Black Identity after Civil Rights*, edited by Derek C. Maus and James J. Donahue
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

The History

(student’s last name)
2014-2015 Student Matinees

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER
SEPT. 17

ETHER DOME
OCT. 30 & NOV. 20

AWAKE AND SING!
NOV. 14

THE SECOND GIRL
FEB. 12

COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA
MAR. 13 & APR. 2

THE COLORED MUSEUM
FEB. 12

Huntington Theatre Company
Avenue of the Arts
In Residence at Boston University
264 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115-4606