MILK LIKE SUGAR

CURRICULUM GUIDE

DIRECTED BY M. BEVIN O'GARA

BY KIRSTEN GREENIDGE
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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 1**
- **Grades 9-10:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **Grades 11-12:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences from from the text, including where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Reading Literature: **Key Ideas and Details 2**
- **Grades 9-10:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **Grades 11-12:** Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide and objective summary of the text.

Reading Literature: **Key Ideas and Details 3**
- **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 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 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 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).
MASSACHUSETTS STANDARDS IN THEATRE

ACTING
• 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
• 2.11 — 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
• 4.13 — 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.
KIRSTEN GREENIDGE: A CONVERSATION WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT

Kirsten Greenidge, a Huntington Playwriting Fellow and adjunct faculty member at Boston University, says that her love of theatre began in childhood. Along with a boy who lived next door, she ran the “Fantasy Theatre Company” and performed plays in her living room, charging the other kids on the street a quarter per admission. She learned quickly, however, that “we needed to buy food with the ticket sales in order to keep the audience happy.”

Greenidge attended the Cambridge Friends School in Cambridge, MA, through the 8th grade and at the age of 12, her class went on a field trip to the Huntington Theatre Company to watch a student matinee performance of Joe Turner’s Come and Gone by August Wilson. Through this experience, Greenidge discovered what she really wanted to be when she grew up: a playwright. However, she wasn’t sure what the next step would be. “I had taken classes at Wheelock [Family Theatre], but how would I do that?” Greenidge recalls thinking. “I am black. I am a girl. I wasn’t sure how to make that happen.”

Greenidge not only found a way to build a successful playwriting career, but carries with her the desire to “work towards a better world for those who come after me. And the way I do that is, I recognize, with my words.” With numerous written works under her belt including Luck of the Irish (performed at the Huntington) and Baltimore among many others, Greenidge has been the recipient of a number of accolades including an Obie Award for Milk Like Sugar, and won both the 2011 Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award and the San Diego Critics Circle 2011 Craig Noel Award for Outstanding New Play for Milk Like Sugar.

She has also been commissioned to write a number of plays, including Milk Like Sugar which was inspired not only by the media stories covering the alleged pregnancy pact in Gloucester, MA, but also as result of opportunities offered by La Jolla Playhouse in 2008, including panel discussions regarding “the track of women in the 21st century.” Greenidge was also inspired by a study that found that the younger the median age of women carrying their first pregnancies, the greater the financial cost to their communities.

She was interested in the discussion about how to raise the age of first-time mothers. At this same time she was watching the story in Gloucester unfold on the news, after seeing her fair share of the controversial “Jerry Springer” talk show in her youth, and concluded that the idea of a pregnancy pact “is not that far-fetched.”

Greenidge makes it clear that Milk Like Sugar “is not a pregnancy play. I’m quick to say it’s not an issue play.” When asked if she thinks pregnancy-pacts are a regularly occurring phenomenon, she responded, “I don’t know if it’s that overt.” In her mind, Milk Like Sugar is really a “what if?” exploration. Will Annie, the play’s protagonist, ultimately have unprotected sex and will it result in a pregnancy? Greenidge hopes that the audience will view Annie as a character for whom the constellation of people around her represent “different options” — different paths through life. Of course, Annie’s best friends, Margie and Talisha, want a fast-track to adulthood, raising their babies together. Malik, another friend, suggests education as a different alternative while Keera offers her religious beliefs. “It’s difficult for [Annie] to find equilibrium,” Greenidge explains. Greenidge guarded against one option though and removed a “teacher” character from an earlier version of the play. “I didn’t want a savior — didn’t want the audience to say, a-ha! She’ll be fine.”

Greenidge gave careful consideration to developing the main characters of the story and their relationships, specifically the dynamic between Margie, Talisha, and Annie. Margie is in the “typical boyfriend ‘oops’ scenario,” Greenidge says. In other words, Margie’s situation seems “normal” especially given her cultural heritage. She has a “supportive network” and “the father is in the picture.” But Margie’s character still gives Greenidge pause: “She keeps me up at night . . . [it’s] a misnomer to say that just age determines successful parenting outcomes. Could society be structured differently? Maybe the problem is structural . . . it’s the container” or lack of one in which our society holds teenage mothers. Ultimately it appears that Margie’s family’s “culture is butting up against Western culture.”

Annie, by contrast, is participating in “high risk behavior, choosing sexual partners without discernment.” Annie lacks Margie’s family support or a long-term relationship. However, it is Talisha that will likely give an audience the most anxiety. “Talisha is in an abusive relationship,” Greenidge explains. “She’s highly vulnerable — and young people who have read this play before, [they] got it fast — vulnerable to trafficking. She’s on a bad road.” Talisha’s boyfriend is older than she is and Greenidge commented that when she wrote about him and Antwoine, the father of Annie’s baby, she was thinking about “young women, 14 or 15 years old and most of the fathers were in their early 20s.” Talisha is not only dealing with a controlling and abusive boyfriend but a man who is several years her senior.
Perhaps the most complicated relationship in the play is between Annie and her mother, Myrna. Annie desperately wants more from Myrna and reaches out to strengthen their bond, but her mother is ultimately “lacking the emotional resources” to offer anything else. “Myrna makes parenting choices that are hard for Annie.” Greenidge believes that Annie will remember “those moments with her own mother and parent differently.” Myrna’s struggle seems to stem from her own resentment about missed opportunities. “Myrna does what people told her to do: she’s married, has a job, and has three kids,” Greenidge says. But she’s “trapped” in her life and lacks a broader world view because by her early 30s she has never even been on an airplane. Instead, “her ideas are big — [she’s] frustrated by not seeing it come to fruition.” Myrna doesn’t know how to realize her hopes and dreams because she’s “never had to work through anything . . . [she’s] been able to live in that fantasy...but then the reality comes crashing down.” When asked if Myrna was disappointed by a teenage pregnancy for her daughter, Greenidge replied, “Myrna definitely wanted more for Annie.”

Myrna and Annie’s horrific fight near the end of the play propels Annie into Antwoine’s arms. So is Annie’s pregnancy intentional? Greenidge is noncommittal about this question. “In that moment [Annie] is desperate to be loved and to find comfort. Is Antwoine the father? Yes. Did she get pregnant that night? I don’t know. I do know that by the end of the play, he is no longer in the picture.” So what does Greenidge hope for for Annie in the future? “I hope she finds peace, finds all the resources she needs. She’s a curious person — I hope she fulfills that part of herself. I think she does. She gets a GED, graduates high school. She does well with parenting and makes some changes . . . I hope she looks up higher than the horizon.”

Annie’s story could be told in a variety of ways, and countless films and school programs address many of the key ideas addressed in this play. But Greenidge believes that “Theatre is a seeing place . . . A place where we see ourselves. Through this play [the audience] is exploring options available to them. What are the ways to break the cycles? Is it through education, faith, love relationships? That is all important to examine.” And for these characters that she is now deeply invested in and the young people she hopes will learn from them Greenidge says, “You are worth being offered as many choices as anybody else in this world.”

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you agree with the playwright’s assertion that Milk Like Sugar is NOT a “pregnancy play”? Why might this labeling interfere with what Greenidge hopes an audience will take from viewing this play?
2. Do you agree with Greenidge that Annie has a hope for the future? How might Annie’s choices differ from her mother’s?
3. Did it surprise you to learn that Kirsten Greenidge once attended a Huntington Theatre Company student matinee? Greenidge believes that seeing more of the world helps young people make more informed decisions. Do you agree that it is valuable to attend field trips such as the one you will take to the Huntington? Why or why not?
4. Consider Greenidge’s comments about her characters’ futures. How much do playwrights know about their characters’ lives beyond what transpires during the action of the play? Why might it be useful for her to have a sense of what Annie and her friends’ lives will be like five, ten, or even twenty years into the future?
CHOICES: INTENDED AND UNINTENDED

Annie’s 16th birthday signals a major turning point in her life. In Milk Like Sugar’s opening moments, set in a tattoo parlor, she waits impatiently for a gift that she is hesitant to receive. She struggles with what design to choose and is ultimately talked out of the tattoo she wants most: a ladybug which symbolizes her mother’s affection. She instead chooses fire — a momentary decision that ultimately holds more meaning as her story unfolds. Rapid and violent change is imminently approaching, as high school graduation is not too far away.

Meanwhile, her friends Margie and Talisha hatch a plan to get pregnant and raise their children together, and as Margie is already pregnant, they are at least part way to realizing the goal. Talisha quickly follows suit, as she is in a steady, although unhealthy, relationship with an older man. None of the girls seem particularly concerned about Annie’s lack of a boyfriend, especially with Malik, a boy from school, signaling interest in Annie. As a birthday present, Talisha sets Annie and Malik up on a date, but Malik is unwilling to participate in the pregnancy pact. Education is his route forward and he refuses to be trapped in the life of struggle he has known. Initially, Annie is unmoved by his ambition. “The sky’s the sky,” she says, revealing her limited ability to see beyond what is immediately around her.

Keera enters Annie’s world at a time during which both girls can clearly see just how quickly Margie and Talisha’s lives are changing. Although Keera lacks popularity, material possessions, and friends of her own, Annie is drawn to her for all of the characteristics that make Keera different. Through their friendship, Annie is exposed to an entirely new way of thinking; Keera describes the way she is honored and protected by her family and how her trust in God and reliance on religion gives her hope and internal reserves to draw from when she faces challenges. But Keera’s words sting Annie’s mother Myrna’s heart and Myrna ultimately lashes out in bitterness and resentment. Unfortunately, Annie carries bitterness and resentment, too, and forgets the decisions she is actively working through before meeting her fate. Myrna, intentionally or not, makes Annie feel small. She does not encourage her daughter or provide a path through life which would be different from her own. Instead, or perhaps as a result of her own regret and disappointment, Myrna claims Annie is worthless. Annie’s desire for love and affection pushes her into the arms of Antwoine — the tattoo artist who painted Annie with fire was himself a catalyst for change and propels Annie’s life towards an uncertain future.

At the play’s end, Annie seems calm but also hopeful. Talisha, Margie, and even Myrna, play a smaller role in her life, but Malik continues to represent an alternative alongside her impending parenthood. It is finally in the play’s last moments that Annie can fully realize the extent of her choices and the reality of the path she has embraced.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you believe that Annie really possessed “choices” or was her pregnancy an inevitable part of her family cycle? Do you think that all teenagers in the United States have the same choices in high school and beyond?

2. Are there any ways in which your ambitions are limited? How does a person make the best decisions for his or her future?

FANTASY AS HOPE

For the teenage girls at the center of Milk Like Sugar, everything from the best way to determine the gender of their babies to the gifts they will receive at their group shower seems to be driven by old wives tales, hearsay, and over-dramatization. Annie, Talisha, and Margie cling to the notion that their lives will be infinitely more comfortable and settled if only they become mothers together. Annie says, “We gonna be like lions, y’all,” as she imagines a future of raising their daughters side by side, strolling them to preschool in pink matching joggers provided by the government. They lack knowledge about the responsibilities, chronic exhaustion, and the heavy financial burden that bringing a child into the world demands. “Work?” Annie comments to her mother, “Not so much.” And perhaps Annie is simply expressing, rather naïvely, her view that motherhood is a perfectly acceptable alternative to working and much more enjoyable as compared to the jobs that would otherwise be available to her. When Annie looks out at her future options, having a baby now seems as realistic and as desirable as anything else she could be doing.

At the beginning of the play, Annie lacks a clear plan for her life. She is easily persuaded to change her tattoo design, and date a boy her friends say is nice with the goal of following Margie into pregnancy. When Annie comments that she and her friends “won’t need moms no more if we each have tiny little babies made
Just for us, right?” she is reflecting the hurt and disappointment she feels in her own relationship with her mother and reveals an unresolved issue that colors the way she views the world.

Annie desperately wants a different kind of family and a different kind of life. The reality of Annie’s situation by the play’s conclusion is perhaps a little grimmer than what she would have originally believed. The three friends are each pregnant but no longer keeping in touch — their paths sadly do not cross in the same way. Annie’s mother no longer calls her ladybug, signaling anger and disappointment that her daughter succumbed to a difficult journey through young adulthood. The hope that Myrna felt for her daughter has evaporated, like many of the fantasies that keep her getting up every day: Myrna will never make the leap from maid to bookkeeper or from dropout to published writer. And yet it was the fantasies that drove Myrna’s hopes for the future, just as they did for Annie, before reality shattered the fragile world they carefully imagined.

QUESTIONS:
1. At the end of the play, do you think Annie has hope for her future? Will she make a good mother?
2. What will happen next for the other young characters in the play: Talisha, Margie, Keera, and Malik?
3. When a situation is challenging, why is it important to have “hope”? Does fantasy serve the same purpose? How is fantasy different from hope?
4. What are your dreams for the future? Are they realistic? When you imagine your future, what do you see?

MILK LIKE SUGAR: WHEN THINGS ARE NOT AS THEY APPEAR

The characters in Milk Like Sugar are complex and not easily typecast. Each individual’s choices are dictated not only by their environmental circumstances but also by the personal traits which define them. Annie is navigating some key decisions in her life by reaching out to the people who represent her various options. Her mother Myrna offers wisdom, but it’s difficult for Annie to hear and absorb because she views her mother as someone who is still struggling to make something of her life. Myrna can speak honestly about what it is like to have a baby and struggle as a young mother. But Annie knows only her mother’s weaknesses, from broken promises to the inability to hold down a job. Annie believes she must choose someone else to lean on — someone who doesn’t so often disappoint.

Talisha pushes the pregnancy pact forward by being the second friend to “pass the test.” But for all of Talisha’s strength, self-reliance, and planning, Annie can plainly see the negative effects of Talisha’s decision to carry her abusive boyfriend’s child. When Talisha demands Keera’s help in school, Annie observes a weakness in her friend, and determines that Keera offers the deep perspective on the world that Talisha lacks. Keera’s religious zeal and prophetic language inspire Annie. But when Annie pries deeper only to discover that Keera’s life is full of sadness and heartbreak, Annie is soured on the notion that religious faith will save her.

Malik is unwilling to be part of Annie’s pregnancy plan because he has his own plan for breaking free from the life he has known. He is working hard in school and trying to avoid common pitfalls that would derail his hopes for the future. He is so desperate to find a way out he even stoops to selling his mother’s pain medication to improve his financial situation as he applies for college. But Malik’s drive and determination are what draw Annie back to him by the play’s end — when all of the other people in her life have let her down, Malik is still pushing forward, true to his original intentions. Annie can recognize that Malik saw what she simply could not — that nothing being offered to her in that time and place was really her best option. She points out, “Milk like sugar on all our shelves in this place and we happy for it.” Her choices were the “fake milk” and she was ultimately unable to reject them.

QUESTIONS:
1. Consider Annie’s journey from the beginning of the play to its conclusion. What “lies” did she believe? What were her biggest mistakes? Which relationship caused her the most grief?
2. How did you feel about Annie at the end of the play? Did she get what she wanted or get what she deserved? What could have gone differently and prevented her pregnancy? By the end of the play, does Annie fully understand the gravity of her situation and what she must do going forward?
1. Where are Annie, Talisha, and Margie in the play’s opening moments? For what reason have they come to this place?
2. Describe the design Annie likes. How does Talisha insult both Annie and Margie?
3. Write down the lyrics of the nursery school song that Annie sings. For what reason does Annie believe it was originally written?
4. Why does Margie believe Jerome is a good boyfriend?
5. Why is Margie excited about having a baby shower?
6. How does Annie keep track of her menstrual cycle?
7. Describe the plan Talisha, Margie, and Annie set in motion. Does everyone agree that this idea is a good one?
8. What does it mean to be PG?
9. What tattoo does Annie say she wants? What does she ultimately get?
10. Who calls Annie during the tattoo session with Antwoine?
11. How does Antwoine know when someone has not “put much thought” into their tattoo design?
12. In plotting their future, how do the girls think their own mothers will react?
13. According to Talisha, what is the “deadline” for the girls’ plan to work?
14. Where does Malik invite Annie to meet him? Why did he choose this place?
15. According to Annie, how did Malik mess up their date?
16. Why does Malik think he is popular? What is wrong with his mom?
17. How does Malik respond to Annie’s physical advances? How does Malik feel about being a father?
18. Who is Myrna?
19. How does Annie get to school?
20. What does Myrna say she will do for Annie’s birthday?
21. Why didn’t Annie’s parents call her on her birthday?
22. Why was Myrna in trouble at work?
23. How does Myrna describe caring for a baby?
24. What does Myrna want her sons to do for her?
25. According to Annie, why don’t people watch movies at the theater?
26. Who in Annie’s family has flown on an airplane?
27. Describe Annie’s new teacher. Why does she annoy Myrna?
28. Why do you think Annie wanted a ladybug tattoo?
29. What does Talisha want from Keera?
30. What do the girls conclude about pregnancy and exercise?
31. What falls out of Keera’s bag that Talisha insults? Who will replace this item and when, according to Keera?
32. Why is Margie nervous about gym class?
33. What can you infer about Talisha’s feelings toward Keera? Does Keera offer the girls any good advice?
34. What secret does Keera promise to keep?
35. How does Keera describe her home life?
36. What are Keera’s religious views? Why does she dislike sneakers?
37. Why does Annie return to the tattoo parlor?
38. Speculate as to the age of Talisha’s boyfriend and provide evidence from the text to support your answer.
39. For what reason(s) does Margie think health class was “useless”?
40. What behavior of Annie’s during class does Talisha mock?
41. Talisha suggests that someone else is dating Malik. What is this person’s name?
42. What test did Talisha “pass” that made Margie happy?
43. Does Annie respect Antwoine? How can you tell?
44. How does Talisha respond when Annie suggests she might not want to get pregnant?
45. Why is Malik “over” Shanea?
46. What did Malik see Annie do that impressed him?
47. How did Malik get a telescope? Does Annie think getting the telescope was a good idea?
48. How is Malik using his mother’s drugs? What motivates his behavior?
49. What is the cause of Malik and Annie’s fight?
50. Why do you think Annie goes to Keera to talk about her problems?
51. How does Keera bother and offend Myrna?
52. How did Myrna’s family handle the news of her first pregnancy?
53. What family ritual does Annie tell Myrna they should adopt? What is Myrna’s reaction?
54. Why is Margie upset by her visit to the nurse?
55. How do Talisha’s friends know that she’s been in a fight with her boyfriend?
56. How did Talisha respond to her boyfriend’s violence?
57. Why was the trip to the mall stressful for Talisha?
58. What does Keera finally admit to Annie about her family? What is her life really like?
59. What happened at Myrna’s job?
60. Why doesn’t Myrna want Aunt Rae to come over?
61. Why do Annie and Myrna end up fighting? What does Myrna say that ends the argument?
62. Who does Annie go to see after the fight with her mother? What happens between them?
63. What does Annie bring Malik as a going away present? Where is he going?
64. How are Margie and Talisha doing according to Annie’s report?
65. Do you think the relationship between Myrna and Annie has changed?
66. How would Annie change Malik’s graduation speech?
67. What do we learn about Annie in the stage directions at the end of the play?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING
Continue your research of Milk Like Sugar. The following suggested works were also used in the development of this curriculum guide.

OTHER PLAYS BY KIRSTEN GREENIDGE:
Baltimore
Hit and Run
Luck of the Irish
Splendor

RELATED FILMS:
Documentary: The Gloucester 18 (2013) directed by John Michael Williams

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:
PREGNANCY PACT: FACT OR FICTION?

Gloucester, Massachusetts, a quiet fishing village north of Boston boasting a population of roughly 30,000, became the target of an international media investigation in 2008 when a sudden spike in teen pregnancies caught the attention of local officials. What drew international attention, however, was not the quadrupling of the high school pregnancy rate but the quiet murmurings of a conspiracy — these pregnancies, according to the rumors, were planned. The media pounced on the story, making it an immediate sensation. The community ultimately decided they had only one choice to push back and protect their daughters: say nothing.

Kim Daly, the school nurse at Gloucester High School, noticed an uptick in students visiting her office requesting pregnancy tests. As the testing kits cost close to $10 at the nearby pharmacy, stopping by the nurse’s office was the more affordable option. Even more startling than the record number of repeat test-takers was the disappointment that often followed when a test came back negative. It appeared that at least some of the “Gloucester 18,” the 18 young women who became pregnant that year, intended their pregnancies. Daly reported administering 150 pregnancy tests over the course of the school year, with 10 confirmed pregnancies noted in her office, with all of the future mothers being 16 years old or younger.

In response to the epidemic, two school staff members began to advocate for the distribution of birth control without parental notification. It seemed clear that Gloucester had a problem, one which required immediate attention and action. However, not everyone agreed on how to proceed. A pediatrician and a nurse practitioner overseeing the school clinic resigned in protest. Meanwhile, the high school’s principal, Joseph Sullivan, would not denounce the pact rumor. He maintained that one student, so desperate to be pregnant, had a sexual relationship with a 24-year-old homeless man in her efforts to conceive. For some adults close to the situation it remained unclear whether access to contraception was actually the root problem.

As the media circus began to intensify, Mayor Carolyn Kirk disputed Principal Sullivan’s remarks, citing zero evidence of a conspiracy. She went on to defend the local citizens by saying, “Teenagers in Gloucester are being hunted down by the national and even international media, and if I had to do it again, I would still stand up and protect the privacy of the families and defend the city against the sensationalized and unsubstantiated reports.” Principal Sullivan agreed with Mayor Kirk on this point, calling for the media to stop its dramatization of the situation and allow these young women to privately “deal with the consequences of their actions.”

Many child psychologists and experts in the field hypothesized that media representations of teen pregnancy, including in the film Juno and the celebrity teen pregnancies of Jamie Lynn Spears and Bristol Palin, glamorized what would otherwise be considered a difficult and unwanted circumstance. In the town of Gloucester, an economically depressed area of the state, many young women lacked the resources to pursue a college degree and were therefore unable to see much else in their futures. Having a baby was perceived as a fast-track out of high school and into adulthood, with the realities of single-parenthood mostly disregarded.

In the first few years after the story gained media attention, a few young women came forward to speak out, including Kyla Brown, who insisted that she was not part of any pact, just an unfortunate victim of teenage naiveté. She was one of many students in the nurse’s office during the 2007-2008 school year with a positive pregnancy test following unprotected sex with her boyfriend. Brown insisted that she was “devastated” by the news of her pregnancy and felt frustrated by being lumped in with the “Gloucester 18,” citing the difficulty of securing a spot at the school’s daycare center now that so many other students were also in need of these same services. While the idea of being pregnant at the same time as one’s girlfriend might hold some appeal, everyone, including Kyla, expressed reluctance to surmise that “peer pressure” was the reason for the sudden surge in pregnancies.

Pact or no pact, the events in Gloucester spurred a number of articles including stories published in The Guardian and The New York Times. The Lifetime television network produced a movie titled The Pregnancy Pact, as well as The Gloucester 18, a critically acclaimed documentary following up with some of the young mothers involved in the scandal. The Huntington Theatre Company examines several difficult issues facing young people today including teenage pregnancy and the “pregnancy pact” phenomenon in its latest production, Milk Like Sugar, written by Huntington Playwriting Fellow Kirsten Greenidge.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Welcome to Gloucester, Massachusetts as America’s oldest seaport

Sign showing Gloucester, Massachusetts as America’s oldest seaport
QUESTIONS:
1. Do you believe that images of teenage mothers, fictional or not, influence a young person’s perception of teen pregnancy?
2. Do you believe at least some women in Gloucester entered a “pact” with friends? Do you think peer pressure can lead to unplanned pregnancy? Might it lead to unprotected sex? Do you think unprotected sex among teenagers is a widespread problem?

BIRTH CONTROL, RIGHT TO PRIVACY & PARENTAL CONSENT

As a minor (defined as anyone under the age of 18), it is important to know both your rights and responsibilities with regard to sexuality and reproduction. Specific laws apply in each state and here are a few you should know, if you live in Massachusetts:

• Massachusetts does not require schools to provide sexual education classes, which includes sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS education. Individual school boards determine when and what is taught, if anything.

• You may take sexual education classes without parental consent. Your parents, however, will be notified if classes are being offered and are allowed to prevent you from attending the class should they disagree with what is being taught.

• In the eyes of the law, a minor is unable to consent to sex until he or she is 16 years old. This is termed the “age of consent.” This rule of law is particularly important if you are engaging in sexual activity before you are 16 and have a sexual partner who is older.

• The Safe Schools Law protects students from harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation.

• As of December 2015, there are no Massachusetts state laws specifically addressing bullying, harassment, or discrimination of students based on gender identity.

• A person at any age is legally allowed to buy condoms.

• All minors are allowed to get a prescription for birth control without parental consent.

• You do not need parental consent to be tested for an STD. However, if doctors determine that your health or life is in danger, your parents will be notified.

• A minor does not need to obtain a prescription for a pregnancy test, which can be purchased at a local pharmacy.

• Minors may purchase Plan B One-Step, emergency contraception following unprotected sex, over the counter. You must be 17 years of age to obtain Next Choice, Next Choice One Dose, My Way or Levonorgestrel, emergency contraception, all of which require a prescription for those under 17 years of age.

• If you are under the age of 18 and desire an abortion you must be given permission by a parent or guardian. This is termed “parental consent.”

• If you are not able to obtain parental consent for an abortion you may ask a judge instead. This is termed “judicial bypass.” A judge may also grant permission in the event of an emergency.

• Massachusetts provides Medicaid coverage for medically necessary abortions.

• There is no mandatory waiting period to obtain an abortion.

• If you are under the age of 18 years old it is illegal to photograph, email/text/post or possess a nude picture or depiction of a sexual act of someone who is also under the age of 18 years old.

• For further information, including Title X clinics in your area which provide services confidentially or help in the event of a rape crisis, please visit http://sexetc.org/states/massachusetts.

QUESTIONS:
1. Do you believe that the Massachusetts laws regarding teenage sexual activity and reproduction are fair to minors? Do you believe it is fair to parents?
2. What laws or services would be helpful to young people facing important sexual or reproductive questions?
3. Would you raise or lower the “age of consent” or do you think the age of 16 is appropriate?

4. How do you think adults could better guide minors in the areas of gender identity, sexual orientation, birth control, and pregnancy? Do you think your current access to information and services is satisfactory? Why or why not?

**PRISON LIFE AND RELIGION**

At Keera’s breaking point in *Milk Like Sugar*, she reveals a startling truth: her parents are flawed. She is not living what she preaches and she prays “to be someone else, anyone else but me, for even just a moment.” Her mother has “lost her way,” spending her entire paycheck at the casinos each week, and her father is incarcerated. She explains, “I visit my father every week. Don’t got no one to take me so I take the Greyhound . . . Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God hath given thee. I go every week even though he got on that orange jump suit. And I got to talk to him behind glass through a phone I know he found his way. He the one, in his letters, start telling me about the Word. Start telling me to read my Bible.”

Chaplains, pastors, and other leaders of every major world religion have a presence nationally in the prison system. Besides offering literature, group programs, and counseling services, religious organizations provide an alternative culture within the prison walls, one that according to religious-based studies seems to improve the odds that a prisoner will be successfully rehabilitated. Religious organizations may be accepted by the prison system, at least in part, because guards and other professionals working at these facilities are also in need of counseling services and spiritual care, as their own job stress can take a significant toll on their personal lives. But the benefits seem most significant for the inmate population. In 2005, the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* reported findings which suggested that religious practice is strongly correlated with a reduction in verbal or physical violence during prison sentences and increases the odds that reform will be achieved after an inmate’s release. Religious organizations maintained a strong presence in prisons long before a myriad of Constitutional court cases were heard on the exercise of religious freedom. These contested rights include, but are not limited to, dietary restrictions, personal grooming and dress, as well as observation of holidays. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) suggests that prisoners keep up-to-date on the latest court rulings by accessing their prison libraries — rights and responsibilities are always evolving.

Prisoners who engage in religious activity and convert to new religions do so for a variety of reasons including the opportunity to connect to a community or change behavioral patterns, protection during prisoner altercations, access to additional prison resources, and to improve their self-esteem. Keera’s father may have let her down as a child, but his plans for improving his life and being a better parent now are directly linked to his religious education and participation within the confines of the prison walls.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Do you believe that Keera’s father is a devout man and one who will continue to practice his religion after he serves his time in jail? Why or why not?

2. Does it surprise you that many inmates participate in religious activities while incarcerated? Why or why not?

3. Can you think of any reasons why a person might object to religious organizers maintaining a presence in the prison system? Especially if participation results in access to additional services within the prison? Can you think of any reasons why a court might reasonably object to an inmate’s request for special privileges (no working on the Sabbath, personal grooming, clothing choices outside what is generally allowed, acceptance of outside letters/materials, etc.)?

**TATTOO REMOVAL: THINK BEFORE YOU INK**

In *Milk Like Sugar*, tattoo artist Antwoine remarks, “Least it ain’t no rose, right? A girl comes in here asks for a rose I know she ain’t put much thought into this at all right, cause a rose ain’t that special right?” In his opinion, choosing the design is important because a tattoo is a long-term commitment. People tattoo their bodies for a variety of reasons such as remembering a loved one, celebrating an idea, or marking their independence. In some cases a person might outgrow a design, have a job that frowns upon visible ink or might outgrow a design. But removing a tattoo is costly and, in some cases, next to impossible.

Tattoos are created by a needle propelled by an electric machine that injects droplets of ink into the second layer of skin, penetrating the first. Tattoos are meant to be a permanent fixture on someone’s skin, and while over 20% of the adult population has a tattoo, 14% regret their original decision to get one.

Tattoo removal is usually achieved by a laser light which breaks up the ink into tiny particles. The lymphatic system is capable of absorbing and then expelling the ink from the surface of
the skin. Black and blue tones are easier to remove than green. Older tattoos are often more difficult to remove as is the art of professional tattoo artists whose work goes deeper into the tissue of the skin. Laser pulses, which remove the ink particles, feel like a rubber band snapping on the skin. The pain a person feels during the process is comparable to getting the tattoo itself, although an antiseptic pain cream is often available to patients undergoing the procedure. In 2011, the FDA reported that nearly 100,000 people completed a tattoo removal process. The cost of removing a tattoo can be considerable, ranging from $50 to $399 per square inch. Most tattoos require 10 laser treatments taking about 20 minutes each to complete. But for a person who has got the name of an ex-girlfriend on their arm, all of the discomfort and money may be worth erasing this symbol of the past.

QUESTIONS:
1. Do you think you would mind the pain of getting a tattoo? Or having it removed? Are there any designs or words you think you could tattoo on your body permanently without regret?
2. Why do you think people’s ideas about their tattoos change over time? What would you NOT tattoo on your body?
3. How have society’s attitudes towards tattoos changed throughout the last century? Do a person’s visible tattoos influence how you perceive them before you get to know them? Does learning that someone you already know has a tattoo affect how you see them?

CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR MILK LIKE SUGAR

Milk Like Sugar, including the 2011 production at Playwrights Horizons in New York City, has been highly praised by theatre critics for its use of language to reveal character, communicate setting, and enhance its metaphors and symbolism. Read the quotes below from published reviews and then answer the questions that follow after you have attended the Huntington Theatre Company’s production of the play.

• “A distinctive view of a matter of vital currency, crisply delineated characters who reveal more layers as the play proceeds, richly funny vernacular dialogue . . . Milk Like Sugar delivers piercing glimpses of the way underachievement and unhappiness are passed down from generation to generation.” — The New York Times
• “Milk Like Sugar’s remarkable features include its locale, an urban, African American subworld that displays, for once, neither the brutalizing clichés of a poverty-stricken ghetto nor the discomfiting artificiality of a talented-tenth safe haven. Instead, Greenidge populates her story with a sampling of the innumerable young people between those extremes.” — The Village Voice
• “Greenidge’s cracking, often humorous dialogue is in the vernacular of inner-city residents who deliberately distort language . . . Metaphors about flames, burning, and flying are nicely woven throughout the story, along with lyrical symbolic imagery.” — The Associated Press
• “Greenidge captures girl speak in unnerving perfection.” — The Daily News
• “The title refers to the sweet powdered milk that offers far more flavor than nutritional value. But the tart Milk Like Sugar offers plenty of both.” — The New York Post

QUESTIONS:
1. Compare and contrast what the critics said about the Milk Like Sugar in the review quotes with what you saw onstage at the Huntington Theatre Company. Though you have not seen the Playwrights Horizons production, what can you infer about the similarities and differences between the two productions?
2. Do you agree with the critics’ statements that playwright Kirsten Greenidge accurately captured the way teenagers really speak? Why or why not?
3. Write your own review of the Huntington Theatre Company’s production of Milk Like Sugar. Consider including:
   • Basic plot information (but be careful not to give away too much of the story!).
   • The themes and big ideas that seemed to be play’s focus.
   • Which character(s) were your favorite(s) and why.
   • A description of any moments that rang particularly true for you and/or moments that you thought seemed false or that did not quite make sense (either way, be sure to talk about why you feel this way).
   • Praise for actors whose performances you thought were particularly skillful or effective.
   • Your opinion on who would be most interested in seeing this show and why they should see it.

Throughout your review, be sure to cite specific evidence from the text of the play and from what you saw in the live performance to support your point of view.
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

ACTING: SCENE STUDY AND CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Select and perform a scene from Milk Like Sugar.

Part 1: Begin preparations to perform the scene by answering the following questions:

- What are the given circumstances (5 W's) of this scene?
- What is the scene’s primary conflict?
- Objectives: What does my character want in this scene? What does my character want in the play overall?
- Tactics: What is my character doing to get what he or she wants?
- Obstacles: What or who is standing in the way of my character’s efforts to achieve his or her objective?
- Stakes: What is at risk for my character? What is the best thing that could happen if my character achieves his or her objective? What is the worst thing that could happen if he or she fails?
- What adjectives describe my character’s personality? Are there any contradictions?
- What statements does my character make about him or herself? What do others say about my character?
- Describe the status of each character in the scene. Does anyone have power over someone else?

Part 2: Create a biographical sketch of your character by answering the following in first person from the character’s perspective:

- Full name and date of birth.
- Where did you grow up? Where do you live now?
- Do you have any siblings?
- Describe your relationship with your parents.
- How did your childhood influence who you are today?
- When you were young, what were your dreams and aspirations? Have these dreams changed over time? If so, how and why?
- Do you have any secrets? If so, what are they?
- What is your best quality? What is your worst quality?
- Describe your sense of humor.
- Do you have any hobbies? If so, what are they? Why do you enjoy them?
- List your favorites: Food, color, music, season.

Part 3: Put the scene on its feet. How can you use stage pictures to communicate the story of the scene? Consider:

- Composition of the onstage images.
- The rhythms of the actors’ movement around the stage.
- The pacing of the dialogue.
- How the actors’ body language and vocal expression reflect the information examined in Parts 1 and 2.
TRADEMARKS AND STATUS SYMBOLS

Status is often associated with material possessions. The type of car a person drives, the clothes someone wears, and even the technology we use signal relative wealth and resources. Annie, Margie, and Talisha agree that the type of phone a man carries is an important factor in determining whether or not he will make a good boyfriend. They are also very excited about the prospect of receiving Coach brand diaper bags from friends and family as shower gifts, and how they will look using them.

Coach has been engaged in litigation protecting its trademark logo and design for many years. People who want to own the luxury handbag without the luxury prices sometimes choose alternatives to retail stores by purchasing used goods on Ebay or through consignment shops. It is also common for consumers to purchase counterfeits or “knock-offs.” In 2013, Coach, Inc., reached a $6 million settlement with a Florida flea market accused of selling fake Coach bags. While Coach, Inc., is protecting its reputation and its branding, some have argued that the people who would buy the counterfeits knowingly would not buy the goods at full price anyway. In other words, does Coach, Inc., suffer a material loss by the sale of “knock-off goods”? Or do lower cost retailers suffer the most harm? Why is it important for a company such as Coach, Inc., to aggressively protect its trademark?

In the table below choose a high-end item that is regularly counterfeited.* Complete the chart by including where it can be bought and which entity you believe suffers the most harm as result of the fraudulent sale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRAND NAME</th>
<th>“KNOCK-OFF” SALE</th>
<th>HARMED COMPANY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COACH</td>
<td>FLEA MARKETS</td>
<td>T.J. MAXX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Chinese manufacturers are regularly accused of trademark and patent infringements on many products ranging from DVDs to footwear. But where can you buy these counterfeit goods?

BONUS QUESTION:

Consider the concept of status. Besides wealth and material possessions, how might a person gain or achieve high status within their peer group? What qualities must a person have to be a respected leader? How might a person gain the attention of her peers in a social setting without a fancy phone or nice jeans? Would you pretend that a counterfeit good in your possession is the real thing? How would you feel if someone accused you of wearing or carrying a “knock-off” item?
EXPLORATION IN THEATRE DESIGN: 
BRANDING & ADVERTISING

Marketing departments at theatre companies such as the Huntington Theatre Company must make deliberate choices about how to advertise a production to maximize ticket sales. From radio spots to banners on taxi cabs, marketing departments decide where to allocate advertising dollars. Marketing departments are also responsible for the design of the advertisements and creating an advertising strategy that will attract patrons to the theatre.

**Work individually or with a group to design the following marketing tools for the play Milk Like Sugar:**

- Play poster — to be used on the marquee, in outside theatre spaces, and on billboards.
- Website Design — to advertise the play on the home page of the company’s website.
- Program — to be distributed to theatregoers as they enter the theatre. Space must be used to list the cast & crew.

**Questions to Consider as You Prepare the Marketing Proposal:**

- Do your designs show continuity across advertising spaces? Would a person viewing the marquee at the theatre recognize the production design when visiting the company website?
- Can you modify one design to work for all three projects?
- Do artists’ renderings or live photographs work better on a large scale, such as a billboard?
- What information (dates, ticket price, actors, etc.) is necessary to include in each design? Does it vary depending on where the item is being viewed?

**WRAP-UP**

Once you’ve completed the assignment, put together some talking points with an explanation of your designs. What lead you to your artistic or strategic choices? What is your rationale for the advertising campaign? After all proposals have been shared, the class will vote to select the best advertising campaign among the group. Good Luck!

*After you’ve selected a class winner, take a look at the book cover design for Milk Like Sugar, published by Samuel French, Inc. Do you approve of the design? Why or why not? www.samuelfrench.com/p/5779/milk-like-sugar
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

QUOTABLE MOMENTS

Choose one of the following quotes from *Milk Like Sugar*. Write an essay analyzing the quote’s meaning. Consider:

- Which character said it?
- Does the character mean it literally or is there an unspoken subtext?
- What does this statement reveal about the character’s way of looking at the world?
- How do the character’s actions support or contradict the quote?
- Do other characters seem to agree or disagree?
- How does the quote contribute to the forward progression of the scene and of the plot as a whole?

1. “Your house is on fire your children will burn.” — Annie
2. “Won’t need moms no more if we each have tiny little babies made just for us, right?” — Annie
3. “This gonna be forever yo, better be what you want, right?” — Antwoine
4. “A girl comes in here asks for a rose I know she ain’t put much thought into this at all right, cause a rose ain’t that special right?” — Antwoine
5. “Whole world seems a thousand times more beautiful when you see it from here.” — Malik
6. “Sky’s the sky, Malik. Nothing special.” — Annie
7. “Work? Not so much. You can dress ‘em real nice. That’s kinda what me and the girls — Cause babies ain’t like real work, they cuddly and cute and love you.” — Annie
8. “Our ma used to say all a little girl need is be pretty and the world can crack open for her like a egg.” — Myrna
9. “Nothing worse than Twinkie without frosting and nothing sadder than a ugly baby.” — Keera
10. “My whole family honor me enough to teach me different.” — Keera
11. “Brought in that banana and all those rubbers but how that gonna teach us about the real thing? Banana don’t talk. Banana don’t make excuses. Banana pretty much do what you want it to do.” — Margie
12. “I’m trying help you. I ain’t interested in throwing away my ticket and staying around here the rest of my life, wasting away like the rest of you all.” — Malik
13. “Cause you and me could use a little baby love us all for us. Right about now. If you ask me. What else we got?” — Talisha
14. “That’s what you do: you clean: other people’s crap; in other people’s lives when you should be listening, you should be paying attention to me. Instead you watching what other people throwing away, what other people with real houses and real jobs and real whole lives are not using, what, all because one teacher back in the sixth grade told you you wrote one story that was good.” — Annie
2015-2016 STUDENT MATINEES

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC SEPT. 24

A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES NOV. 20

MILK LIKE SUGAR FEB. 11 & 26

AUGUST WILSON’S HOW I LEARNED WHAT I LEARNED MAR. 11 & 31

I WAS MOST ALIVE WITH YOU JUNE 10

HUNTINGTON THEATRE COMPANY

264 HUNTINGTON AVENUE

& SOUTH END

IN RESIDENCE AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY

BOSTON, MA 02115-4606