

STICK FLY

By **Lydia R. Diamond**
Directed by **Kenny Leon**

CURRICULUM GUIDE

This Teacher Literary and Curriculum Guide was prepared for the Huntington Theatre Company by Lynne Johnson, Associate Director of Education for the Department of Education and Community Programs at the Huntington Theatre Company.

With contributions by:

Donna Glick, *Director of Education*

Charles Haugland, *Literary Associate*

Kevin Dunn, *Education Department Intern*

Thom Dunn, *Layout*

Special thanks to **Arena Stage** for allowing us to incorporate portions of their Teacher Curriculum and Study Guides for *Stick Fly*.

BACKGROUND AND SYNOPSIS

This first section will provide you and your students with background information on the play, and learning objectives for studying the play, as well as guidelines for audience etiquette when viewing the play at the Huntington Theatre Company.

BACKGROUND



Cambridge-based playwright Lydia R. Diamond's plays have been compared to those of August Wilson, Lynn Nottage, Wendy Wasserstein, and even Eugene O'Neill — four skilled and important writers whose style, content, and background actually have very little in common. And yet they are all apt comparisons for a writer who combines intellectual curiosity and artistic range with graceful and pointed humor. In her plays, intelligent, complicated, American characters spar with our history, our future, and our present while managing to speak to a wide variety of audiences. Diamond's plays prove that complex questions make for riveting drama.

After graduating from Northwestern with a degree in theatre and performance studies, Diamond stayed in Chicago and produced her plays and several others under the auspices of a small theatre company she started. Like much of her writing, the name of the company was self-conscious, serious, and rather funny: Another Small Black Theatre Company with Good Things to Say and a Lot of Nerve Productions. The Chicago theatre scene is so supportive of independent artists, that Diamond was able to write, produce, and act in plays both with her own company and others.

In 1998, MPAACT, a black theatre company in Chicago, mounted a production of *The Inside* — which they described as a “piercing take on race, academia, art, and sexuality.” This was Diamond’s first production that wasn’t self-produced. Soon after, Chicago’s larger theatres began to take notice of the young, dynamic talent. The prestigious Goodman Theatre premiered her play *The Gift Horse* in 2002. Awards, commissions, and productions followed, notably *The Bluest Eye* and *Voyeurs de Venus* with Steppenwolf Theatre Company.

Five years ago, Diamond relocated to Cambridge with her husband and son. She became a Huntington Playwriting Fellow in 2005 and now teaches playwriting at Boston University. This past year she completed a commission from the Huntington, an adaptation of Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* called *Lizzie Stranton*, which was read as part of last summer’s Breaking Ground Festival.

Stick Fly first premiered in 2006 and, like much of Diamond’s work, deals with the lives and concerns of upper class African-Americans — often academics — a subject that now seems prescient in the age of Obama. But, her work can’t be reduced to its politics; for the artist as social observer, it is what is most compelling to write about. Diamond speaks of it this way: “I notice that America has a real comfort zone with seeing African-Americans in certain ways . . . that are limiting just because it’s a narrow perspective of a very complicated, huge part of America.”

SYNOPSIS

When the LeVay family opens its house for a weekend visit, the family ends up airing more than the drapes.

The LeVay brothers have invited the women in their lives to meet their parents at their luxurious Martha’s Vineyard summer home. Younger brother Kent, who has struggled to find direction in his life, and has issues getting along with his father, brings his fiancée Taylor, who studies insects for her vocation. Taylor was raised in a lower-middle-class household by a single mother. Unaccustomed to privilege, she is uncomfortable in the LeVays’ home, especially with Cheryl, who is filling in for her mother as the LeVays’ maid. Eldest brother Flip, a successful plastic surgeon and womanizer, brings his new girlfriend, Kimber, who is privileged, white and has spent her life appalled by her status.

Tensions flair as race, class and family become prime conversation topics. When a phone call reveals a family secret, everything unravels. By the end of the weekend, lives have been turned upside-down and a family is left to reassemble the pieces.

*“Look baby, you just have to look at everyone like they’re under a microscope. Like ants. Figure out the patterns.” ~ Taylor, **Stick Fly***

CHARACTERS AND OBJECTIVES

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Taylor, twenty-seven, daughter from an earlier marriage of a renowned public intellectual.

Kent (Spoon), thirty-one, youngest son of the LeVay family, growing up with an artistic disposition in a family of doctors and lawyers.

Cheryl, eighteen to twenty-two, daughter of the family maid.

Flip (Harold LeVay), thirty-six, oldest son of the LeVay family. The “golden boy”.

Dad (Joe LeVay), fifty-eight to sixty-two, LeVay patriarch. A well-intentioned man who rules his family with a firm, loving hand.

Kimber, thirty-two, white. Flip’s girlfriend. Kimber is an intelligent woman with a quick wit and sincere warmth. Unlike Taylor, her social status matches that of the LeVays, with, of course, the undeniable privilege of whiteness.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. Identify central themes in *Stick Fly* including:
 - a. Generational Conflict
 - b. Interracial Romance
 - c. Definitions of Achievement
 - d. Class/Status in America
2. Learn about the history of the setting in which the play takes place.
3. Analyze the significance of the play’s themes and issues within American culture and relate themes and issues in the play to their own lives.
4. Compare the differences and similarities of “The Black Elite” and “White Privilege.”
5. Discover Lydia Diamond’s contributions to and impact on American theatre today.
6. Participate in hands-on activities that enhance understanding of the play and production.
7. Critique the Huntington Theatre Company’s production of the play.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Because many students have not had the opportunity to view live theatre, we are including an audience etiquette section with each literary/curriculum guide. Teachers, please spend time on this subject since it will greatly enhance your students' experience at the theatre.

1. How does one respond to a live performance of a play, as opposed to when seeing a film at a local cinema? What is the best way to approach viewing a live performance of a play? What things should you look and listen for?
2. What is the audience's role during a live performance? How do you think audience behavior can affect an actor's performance?
3. What do you know about the theatrical rehearsal process? Have you ever participated in one as an actor, singer, director, or technical person?
4. How do costumes, set, lights, sound, and props enhance a theatre production?

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

There are a number of ways to use this curriculum guide depending upon your class curriculum. Below are *Questions* and *Projects* to be used for preparation before your students have read or seen the play, and later in the guide you will find questions and projects to assign to the students after having read or viewed the play.

Midway through the guide are *Supplementary Materials* that will enhance your students' experience of the play before or after reading or seeing it, and provide them with extra information on which to base their responses to it.

At the end is a section called *Mastery Assessment* with more detailed questions on the play, as well as a *Quotations* section to inspire class discussion or to be used as writing prompts, a *Vocabulary* section, and multiple suggestions for lesson plans designed for 1-, 4- and 7- day units. Please feel free to mix and match questions and exercises from different sections, and use the curriculum guide in whatever way suits the needs of your class.

PREPARATION FOR *STICK FLY*

CENTRAL THEMES AND QUESTIONS

Generational Conflict

In *Stick Fly*, the characters of Dad and Kent are in an ongoing conflict as father and son. Their moral and ethical choices clash. The turbulence of their relationship mirrors their own individual struggles for personal integrity and growth; the influences of the generations of African-Americans that they represent.

Define the word *integrity* and make a list of what you consider to be your own personal values.

Interview your parents and compile another list of their values. Compare and contrast the lists. How are they similar? How are they different? Do you feel the two generations are tolerant of each other's differences?

Do you feel that parents and children can still express love and respect for each other despite these differences?

Interracial Romance

In *Stick Fly*, Flip and Kimber, an interracial couple, are both coming to terms with and celebrating their racial differences. Though both take pleasure in the perceived rebellion about their public displays of affection, Flip also worries about his family's acceptance of his white girlfriend. His concern is understandable: as recently as 50 years ago, a mixed-race couple would not have been allowed to marry in many states. The United States is often thought of as a melting pot, but its history of racism and government-mandated segregation has kept the number of interracial marriages relatively low.

- Research the Laws regarding marriages between blacks and whites in our country.
 - What year did the law prohibiting blacks and whites to marry begin?
 - What state instituted the law first?
 - Which state was the first to allow marriages between blacks and whites? What year?
 - What year did these laws become overturned and what was the name of the case, ruled unconstitutional regarding a mixed couple who were married in Washington, D.C., and forced to live there because the state of Virginia barred their union?

- In 1970 1% of all American marriages were interracial. The Population Reference Bureau recently did a study on interracial marriages in America. What do you think is the percentage of interracial marriages in America in the present?
 - 45.2%
 - 5.4 %
 - 10.5%
 - 12.3%

African-Americans with advanced degrees, like Flip, are more likely to marry interracially than those with only a high school diploma. In light of these trends, the United States may be seeing more mixed couples in the future.

How do you feel about interracial marriage? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?

When you hear the term “melting pot” what does it mean to you as an American?

Do you think interracial marriages are more likely in a situation where an African-American has an advanced degree?

Can you think of a movie you've seen or a book you've read that focuses on interracial romance?

Definitions of Achievement

In *Stick Fly* the views on what is defined as achievement and success vary from character to character. Joe LeVay (Dad) has built a solid reputation as a neurosurgeon, while his son Flip has found plastic surgery to be his vocation. When son Kent decides he'd like to become a writer after years of college pursuing a law degree, a business degree and a master's in sociology, his father feels he is a failure and incapable of committing to one profession.

After all of the time and money spent for Kent to attend college, do you feel Kent has the right to change his focus when he finally discovers something he feels he is successful at?

Do you feel Dr. Clay has the right to think Kent has failed because it took him a bit longer to find out what he wants to do with his life?

Dr. Clay greets his son by saying "So, what's up with you? Found a career you want to stick with for five minutes?" What do you think he means? What is he saying about his son's character and life choices?

Have you ever been interested in a profession or project that your parents felt was unsuitable or a waste of your time and energy? How did that make you feel?

Class/Status in America

In *Stick Fly* class and status play a large part in overall make-up of each character and their objectives in the play. For instance, Taylor's character is conflicted by the fact that she was neglected by her famous and well-to-do father, while she and her mother struggled to survive on a single mother's salary. Taylor's background drives her character's perception of the wealthy Dr. LeVay and his family, and sets up her role as the protagonist in the play.

Amber's presence also helps to set the tone for the play. Taylor is made to feel a double sense of lower status, due to the fact that Amber is wealthy and also white. Taylor feels threatened on several levels because she feels Amber fits in better with the wealthy LeVay's than she does as a black woman.

RESEARCH AND PROJECTS

History of Martha's Vineyard

An island off the coast of Massachusetts, Martha's Vineyard is often thought of as a vacation spot for rich and glamorous white people. However, a closer look reveals the island's rich cultural and racial history.

Divide students into groups and research the history of Martha's Vineyard where *Stick Fly* takes place. You will find that the background of Martha's Vineyard will provide the perfect backdrop to underscore the themes in our play.

Group One

The original residents, the Wampanoag's were the first people to settle Martha's Vineyard. They called the island Noepe, meaning, "land amid the waters." More Native American tribes joined the Wampanoag's, eventually creating a community of 3,000 people divided among four chief tribes.

Research information about the Wampanoag's past and present history on Martha's Vineyard.

Group Two

Oak Bluffs is rich in black history and remains a community for most well off African-Americans – politicians, artists, academics, etc. Interestingly, the African-American residents call the main beach of Oak Bluffs "The Inkwell", a pointed name referring to the black community in the largely white Martha's Vineyard. In *Stick Fly*, Taylor's famous professor father notably owned a cottage in Oak Bluffs.

Surprisingly, the idea of taking summer vacation in Martha's Vineyard has its roots steeped in religion. From about 1790 to 1840, the United States experienced the Second Great Awakening, a period of religious revival and massive conversions and the formation of new congregations. The island was also caught up in religious fervor, which resulted in the forming of Oak Bluffs.

Research information about the town of Oak Bluffs, and how Reverend John Saunders, one of the first blacks to settle in the area can be credited for his diversity, because he brought Methodism to Martha's Vineyard changing the features Martha's Vineyard, making Oak Bluffs the beautiful town it is today.

Group Three

Joe Clay owns his home in Edgartown, which is known to be a predominately high status white population. In 1879, the black community was so considerable on Martha's Vineyard that African-American residents voted to separate Oak Bluffs from the bigger, white-dominated Edgartown and form their own town.

Find pictures of the homes and Oak Bluffs and Edgartown. How does the history of each of these towns dictate the difference in styles and architecture?

Meet the Playwright

A Diamond in the Rough

Lydia Diamond

It's not unusual for a 12-year-old girl to have a crush on a baseball player. However, when that girl transcribes her fantasies into a romance novel—which she acts out with her Barbie dolls—it's not hard to imagine her future as a successful playwright.

Detroit native Lydia Diamond (formerly Lydia Gartin) comes from an artistic and intellectual background: her grandmother played the piano and taught lessons at a church, and her grandfather played the violin and was an interim principal at a predominantly white elementary school. Both held master's degrees, a rarity for black people in the first half of the 20th century. Diamond's mother also played the piano and flute, and she managed a fine arts center at University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Diamond tried her hand at the violin, but she discovered that her calling led her down a more dramatic path.

In 1987 Diamond enrolled in Northwestern University as an aspiring actress, but after taking a playwriting class from the only African-American professor on campus, she switched her major from acting to performance studies. After graduation, Diamond remained in Chicago and launched her own company, *Another Small Black Theater Company with Good Things to Say and a Lot of Nerve Productions*—which she fondly describes as a “one-woman show with the support of a lot of talented and beautiful friends.” While working as a cook and waitress at Café Voltaire, she took the opportunity to present her work in its basement. The performance of her first piece, *Solitaire*, was well received and led to many other productions.

Diamond continued to write plays, but it wasn't until she became a resident with Chicago Dramatists that she began to define herself as a playwright. Though she continued to pick up a few acting roles, she eventually shifted her entire focus from being onstage to the page. In an interview with the Ma'at Production Association of Afrikan Centered Theater, she said, “My experiences as an actor helped me understand that I am truly a playwright, that writing the plays made me feel empowered in a way that acting never did.”

Along with the epiphany came a period of struggle. Diamond worked temp jobs and had little money to support her craft. However, after a production of *The Gift Horse* at Chicago's Goodman Theater, her luck changed.

Steppenwolf's Artistic Director Martha Lavey and Director of New Play Development Edward Sobel offered Diamond a commission, which became *Voyeurs de Venus*, a play about Saartje Baartman, a 19th-century South African woman taken to America and exploited for her body. Diamond continued to work with Steppenwolf on her adaptation of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

Diamond's other plays include *Stage Black*, *The Inside*, *Lizzie Stranton*, and *Stick Fly*. Diamond has said of *Stick Fly*, "What I think is interesting, and what *Stick Fly* explores, is that the struggles don't necessarily change because the environment does. But the environment can change, and black people in those environments are black, too." She is most attracted to themes of "relationships, race and class...things that we can't seem to resolve naturally."

Diamond is currently working on *Harriet Jacobs: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and teaching playwriting part-time at Boston University. She lives with her husband, John Diamond, a sociologist and professor at Harvard University, and their son, Baylor.

Assignment

How can learning about and analyzing the lives of artists help us to understand their art?

1. Read or view the play.
2. Research other articles about Lydia Diamond you may find online.
3. Based on the information you receive, formulate an opinion on which of the characters in *Stick Fly* the playwright might most identify with.
4. Based on your conclusion, draw parallels between that character and the playwright. Be specific.
5. Decide why she may have written this play, and what main point she wanted to drive home through this character's voice.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

"The Black Elite" and "White Privilege"

The Black Elite

After Reconstruction, there emerged in America a new social class, the black elite. Some former slaves, now able to own property, were starting their own businesses and attending college. The brightest were entering lucrative careers in medicine, dentistry, and law. Those achieving the highest levels of financial and educational success become known as the black elite, or the black aristocracy.

Still separate from whites, they started their own social and civic organizations, such as Jack and Jill, and hosted their own formal events.

In cities, one of the most popular social events was the cotillion ball - formal dance dating back to 18th-century France. Generally sponsored by an elite social organization, cotillions were chances to introduce wealthy young women - called debutantes - to well-to-do society. In preparation of these balls, debutantes learned formal dances and proper etiquette, and they shopped for fancy dresses. Young men from other wealthy families served as their escorts and dance partners.

Cotillions are becoming less common, but they remain popular in many Southern cities, including Raleigh, Charleston, Memphis and Baltimore.

Activity: Look up pictures from cotillions, both past and present. Select your favorite image. Imagine you're a person in that photograph. Write a 1- to 2- page narrative or monologue describing your experience at the cotillion. What did you wear? Who were your dance partners? What drama unfolded during the cotillion?

White Privilege & Race

The character Taylor shares the story of an honors seminar she took in college, and, in telling it, unleashes her anger about racial inequality and white privilege.

Taylor expresses her frustration at taking a class on 20th century feminism that does not include any authors of color. She also rails at “teaching cultural sensitivity 101 every time I turn around.”

Critical race theory often focuses on the disadvantages people experience because of their race. White privilege focuses on the advantages white people have by virtue of being white. Through the lens of white privilege, white people view their lives as normal, rather than advantaged.

In her paper “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” Peggy McIntosh writes, “I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group.” As a white woman, she lists 50 examples of white privilege from her daily life. These include:

- “I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.”
- “I am never asked to speak for all people of my racial group.”
- “I have no difficulty finding neighborhoods where people approve of our household.”
- “I can choose blemish cover of bandages in ‘flesh’ and have them more or less match my skin.”

McIntosh points out that some aspects of white privilege, like feelings of safety, should be true for all people in a just society. Other aspects, such as not having to pay attention to the art, issues or voices of other races, should be true for no one.

Some theorists argue that approaching race from the angle of white privilege involves all people—including whites—in changing the systems in America and making them more just and equal.

Activity: Race is not the only issue the LeVays and their guests discuss. When you watch the play, notice the moments when the issue of class intrudes. Identify some of those moments in the play. How do the characters relate to each other with regard to the issue of class. In general, do you feel that the United States faces up to the challenges of class differences? Why or why not?

*“You know, they’d hold the bag up to your face...run the comb through your hair and if the comb can’t get through, or if the bag’s lighter than you, well...clearly you’re at the wrong party.” – Dr. LeVay in **Stick Fly***

FACT: Brown Paper Bag Test

The brown-paper-bag test was a tool for discrimination within the black community. It was used to determine who could participate in certain activities, cotillions, fraternities and events. If your skin was darker than the bag, you were not welcome. The test echoes the value system created by slavery, when the darker slaves worked in the fields and the lighter slaves worked in the home of the slave-owner.

Research the years following the American Civil War to establish both legal and illegal tools of discrimination. Discover not only the ways and means of race discrimination between whites and African-Americans, but determine how the issue of class within the African American community contributed to discriminatory actions.

Stick Fly Vocabulary

The following vocabulary words taken from the text of the play can be used as an in-class quiz or as a homework assignment before or after viewing the play.

Sycophantic

Drivel

Sordid

Confrontation

Aesthetic

Sparring

Carnal

Philanthropic

Trivial

Arbitrary

Implicit

Pretentious

Intrinsic

Diluted

Inherent

Inebriated

Cotillion

Libel

Ingratiate

Mirthful

Histrionic

Stratification

Ramifications

Hypocrisy

Extra Credit:

Octoroons

Quadroons

Birkenstock

Bell Hooks

Lamentation

Precipitate

OPEN RESPONSE & WRITING

Assignments

Open Response Assessment

Students: Please answer the following as thoroughly as possible. Remember to use topic sentences and examples from the text.

1. Most plays have a protagonistic and antagonistic force. Define these two terms. Who or what is the protagonist in this play? Who or what is the antagonist? Justify your choices.
2. In the first scene with Taylor and Kent, what information do the characters reveal which provides information on what stories may be revealed in the play? Give specific examples of text.
3. Explain why you think Flip and Kent keep describing Kimber as being Italian. Do they think it will make a difference to the other visitors of the Vineyard that weekend? Explain.
4. Dr. LeVay has distinctly different relationships with both of his sons. Discuss the difference in the way Dr. LeVay treats Kent as compared to Flip. What do you feel are the main reasons he does so? Discuss what these relationships say about Dr. LeVay's character.
5. Taylor and Kimber "knock heads" in Act 1, Scene 5. Getting to the true heart of the matter, what would you describe as the root of the underlying problem Taylor has with Kimber?
6. Explain why you think the playwright chose the title *Stick Fly* for the play? Decide on a different title, and explain why it either works or doesn't work as an alternative for the play.
7. Choose a favorite character. What do you think happens to this character after the play ends? Write a paragraph describing where they are one, five or ten years later.
8. In the play, Taylor and Cheryl seem to be "uncomfortable" around each other. In your assessment, why do these two characters feel this way?
9. Choose a relationship between two characters in *Stick Fly*, who you believe makes the most dramatic change during the course of the play. In an essay, describe the journey these two characters take.

Writing Assignments

Teachers: The following can be used as possible topics for well-planned and carefully written paragraphs. Encourage students to use topic sentences and examples from the text.

1. Write a critical review of the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *Stick Fly* and submit it for publication in your school newspaper.
2. Choose one of the main characters in the play and write a journal entry from his or her point of view, expanding on what we already know. Place the character at a key moment in the play, a time critical to propelling the action forward.
3. Many of the characters in this play are at life defining moments. Write a short essay about a similar time in your own life. How did these life-defining moments affect you? How did you deal with it? Do you believe you would have done anything differently now to solve the situation?
4. Mrs. LeVay and Cheryl's mother, Ms. Ellie, are not "on-stage" characters, but still vital to action of the play. Choose one of these characters and write a journal entry from their point of view, expanding on what you already know about them in the story.
5. Use one of the following lines from *Stick Fly* as a topic for a short essay:

KENT: Mom's classy/ French, Italian, Swahili. Undergrad art history, master's child development, MFA interdisciplinary arts integration, all so she could be here with warm cookies when we got home from school.

TAYLOR: No, Kimberly. I was upset because people like you can't see it. Your inner-city kids aren't supposed to succeed...As long as they can stay ignorant and dependent on you, they won't have to mess up the white spaces. They let one or two of us in who've had enough privilege to almost play the game. Just enough to make us think we're special.

KIMBER: I want to have the babies of the man I love. They'll come out whatever color they come out, and I will love them because they will be my babies. You can't know this. But you will. You will be in love one day, and you will know this.

KIMBER: Racism, discrimination, whatever. You can't imply that it exists. It's like we're supposed to have come so far that it's taboo to suggest we have any further to go.

6. Cheryl finds out shocking news in the play. Write and perform a monologue in which Cheryl talks directly to Dr. LeVay following the revelation that he is her biological parent.

7. Lydia Diamond has written this play in order to present the African-American experience in America in a different light than is normally portrayed on television and in the movies. Do you think Ms. Diamond has successfully presented a realistic portrait of normal African-American lifestyle? Why or why not?
8. Taylor, who studies bugs for a living, quotes her mother: "Look baby, you just have to look at everyone like they're bugs under a microscope. Like ants. Figure out the patterns." Write a brief essay stating what you think this means and how it relates to the title of the play.
9. Choose a character from the play and write a short biography of their life leading up to where the play begins. Include and expand on information, which has been given by the playwright.

MASTERY ASSESSMENT

Act 1

Scene 1

1. How does Taylor feel about Kent's family situation?
2. Describe the dynamic between Taylor and Flip.
3. Who is the original owner of the Martha's Vineyard estate, and what is the estate's history?

Scene 2

1. Why do Kent and Taylor express disdain for spending "quality family time" playing Trivial Pursuit?
2. How does Taylor treat Cheryl? How do the other characters treat Cheryl? Do you notice any significant patterns or contrasts?
3. What is Mr. LeVay's attitude toward his sons and Taylor? What are their attitudes towards Mr. LeVay?
4. What do we learn about Mrs. LeVay?

Scene 3

1. What might Mr. LeVay have to say to Cheryl?
2. What is the significance of Kent's rewrite?

Scene 4

1. Why does Cheryl ask if Taylor has read her own father's book?
2. What does Taylor imply when she tells Kimber "I thought you'd have an accent?"
3. Taylor, Cheryl, and Kimber are the only non-family in the house, and each is trying to assert or establish her own role. Do these roles come into conflict? Explain.

Scene 5

1. What does Taylor call the eight white girls in her women's studies class? What is she suggesting by giving them all the same name?
2. Compare the interaction between Mr. LeVay and Taylor with the interaction between Kent and Kimber. Do these seemingly opposite characters clash, or do they form peculiar alliances?
3. When Mrs. LeVay is mentioned in this scene, how do the family members and particularly Mr. LeVay react?
4. What do we find out about Taylor and Flip in this scene? How does Flip describe their history?

Act 2

Scene 1

1. This scene shuttles between two conversations, often with two characters saying the same thing simultaneously, despite being in different rooms. What effect does this produce? What is the playwright's purpose in having the scenes occur simultaneously?
2. When Mr. LeVay says "I'm not a rocket scientist; I'm just a neurosurgeon," do you think that he's being humble, arrogant, ironic, or something else?

Scene 2

1. What apparent gesture of goodwill does Kimber make towards Taylor?
2. In both this and the previous scene, how does the relationship between Taylor and Kent contrast with the relationship between Kimber and Flip?

Scene 3

1. What story does Kimber tell that turns out to be false?
2. What scandal that has been slowly growing throughout the play culminates in this scene?
3. At the end of the scene, Flip asks his father "How did you not stop to think about us?" Given the circumstances, this seems like a peculiar reaction. How do you interpret it?

Scene 4

1. What is the misunderstanding between Kent and Flip?
2. In this scene, there are two people in the living room, and two people in the kitchen. Are they having different conversations, or are they discussing the same event from different perspectives? Explain.
3. With whom does Kent most identify, his mother or his father? With whom does Flip most identify?

Scene 5

1. What life experience do Taylor and Cheryl share?
2. Mrs. LeVay and Ellie are constantly referred to in the play, but never actually make an appearance. What effect does this produce?
3. What is the double-significance of Taylor saying that everyone needs to stay "to clean up the mess?" What is the double-significance of Mr. LeVay's response?
4. Of all of the relationships in the play, which do you think will succeed, and which do you think may fail? Have any already failed?
5. Discuss the role of alcohol in the play.
6. How do you interpret the last line? Is it meant to be humorous? Ironic? Representative of the play? If you were playing the role of Taylor, how would you deliver this line?

ARTS ASSESSMENT

The following exercises are interactive, hands-on challenges in Drama, Music and Visual Art and Design that inspire further consideration or understanding of the play.

DRAMA

Characterization

Have each student choose a character from *Stick Fly* to portray. As if they were preparing for the role in rehearsal, have them answer the following questions about their characters:

1. What do I want in the play? What is my overall objective?
2. What stands in the way of what I want? What or who are my obstacles in the way of achieving my objective? Does what I want change throughout the course of the play? How?
3. How, if at all, does my character change during the course of the play? What is my character's journey or plot transformation?
4. Are there any contradictions inherent in my character?

Going Deeper: Ask students to consider their character's cultural background and how it influences that character's actions in the play. Other factors to consider are: what was the most important event in the character's life prior to the time depicted in the play; why does the character pursue his or her current objective in the play; what specific events in the character's past affect the way that character speaks or moves during the play?

Role Playing/Improvisation

Ask students to improvise an important moment from *Stick Fly*. Students should test the effects of changing something about the performance—tone of voice, a character trait, or a vital remark. How does such a change affect the selected moment? How does the pacing or posturing of an actor affect the timing of the piece? Is it possible that a change in the tone of voice can turn a serious moment into a humorous one?

Ask students to improvise scenes using characters who are mentioned in the play but are not onstage, i.e. (1) Mrs. and Dr. LeVay's argument before the Dr. leaves to go to the Vineyard, or (2) The telephone conversation between Mrs. LeVay and Ms. Ellie following the revelation that Dr. LeVay is Cheryl's biological father.

Going Deeper: Have students choose one character at a particularly defining moment in their life, prior to, or subsequent to the events of *Stick Fly*. Ask students to create a monologue or in pairs create a scene, which portrays this defining moment in the character's life. How do the character's choices and reaction to this fictional defining moment compare to events in the play?

Visual Art

In the play there are references to art and art history most likely due to the fact that Ms. LeVay received her undergraduate degree in art history. In Act 1, Scene 1 Taylor is looking at the house décor and notices a painting by the artist Romare Bearden. She also alludes to the fact that there are other original artwork by artists' not mentioned. Have your students research the work of Romare Bearden. Based on their findings, ask students to determine what other artwork might be of interest to the LeVay family, best fitting the décor of their Martha's Vineyard summer home.

Going Deeper: Ask students to choose one or two characters from the play. Based on what they know about each character, have them research and choose artwork they feel would best express the personality of the character(s).

THE DESIGN PROCESS

The world of *Stick Fly* could be unfolding at the same time the audience is watching the play. The playwright intentionally includes references to current culture and events. The characters are familiar to us, the language is accessible, and situations the characters experience are ones to which the audience can identify with.

What are some tangible items that represent modern day? Have students work to create a "setting collage", considering what they can include to make their piece represent the 21st century, considering events, music, fashion, politics, social and cultural concerns. How do you illustrate every day life? Then, have them consider how to capture their "setting collage" onstage. Are there certain items students can think of that would help create the atmosphere so the actors don't appear as if they could be any place at any time? How do you create a life-size visual of a day-in-the-life of a modern family that still looks theatrical?

Costume Design

Imagine that you have been asked to design costumes for the play. Choose a character and create a costume plan for your character. For each scene, write down what your character is wearing. Make sure to note the playwright's stage directions. You may draw the costumes or provide pictures from magazines or the Internet as a visual aid for your plan. Remember that costuming provides visual cues to the audience about what is happening in the play. How does your character's wardrobe change from Act 1 to Act 2? Costumes should reflect the character's age and social status. What colors and styles do you think reflects the character's personality and mood? Each character's circumstances should be reflected through the clothing he/she wears. After attending the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *Stick Fly*, compare your costuming ideas with those of the production's costume designer. How are they similar or different?

LESSON PLANS

Teachers' Note: Choose activities that are appropriate for your classroom period. All assignments are suggestions. Only a teacher knows his or her class well enough to determine the level and depth to which any piece of literature may be examined.

ONE-DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the context and major themes of the production.

DAY ONE – Introducing the Play

1. Distribute **Mastery Assessment** for *Stick Fly* for students to read before the performance and to review again after attending it.
Optional: Distribute Vocabulary Handout and ask students to define each word. A vocabulary test could be administered after viewing the play.
2. Read the **Synopsis** of the play. Discuss other works students have studied with similar themes and issues.
3. If time allows, discuss further pages from the literary guide, narrating highlights for students.

FOUR-DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the production and then, after viewing the performance, asks them to think critically about what they have seen. Includes time for class discussion and individual assessment.

DAY ONE – Introducing the Play

Same as Day One above; completed before seeing the production.

DAY TWO – The Production

Attend the performance at the Huntington Theatre Company.
Homework: Students should answer the **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY THREE – Follow-up Discussion

Discuss **Mastery Assessment** answers in class.

DAY FOUR – Test

Individual Assessment: Choose either several questions from the **Open Response** or two questions from **Writing Assignments** for students to answer in one class period.
Optional: Students may choose one of the **For Further Exploration** or **Media Assessment** tasks to complete for extra credit.

SEVEN-DAY LESSON PLAN completely integrates *Stick Fly* into your schedule. Within seven school days, you can introduce the play, assign reading and vocabulary, and assess your students as individuals and in groups. Students will ideally view the play after completing **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY ONE – Introducing the play

Same as Day One above.

Optional: Distribute Vocabulary Handout due on Day Three.

Homework: Read Act One and answer corresponding **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY TWO – Act One

Discuss Act One and answers to **Mastery Assessment** questions.

Homework: Read Act Two and answer corresponding **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY THREE – Act Two

Discuss the end of the play and answers to **Mastery Assessment** questions.

Optional: Review Vocabulary Handout.

DAY FOUR – Attend Performance

Homework: Ask students to read information in **Meet the Playwright**.

DAY FIVE – Group Work - Ask students to do **Research and Projects**.

Take time for class discussion. Schedule library time if necessary.

Homework: Have students complete crossword puzzle.

DAY SIX – Review/Preparation

Students should answer the **Open Response** questions as preparation for their test the following day.

DAY SEVEN – Test

Individual Assessment: Choose two questions from the **Writing Assignments** for students to answer in one class period

