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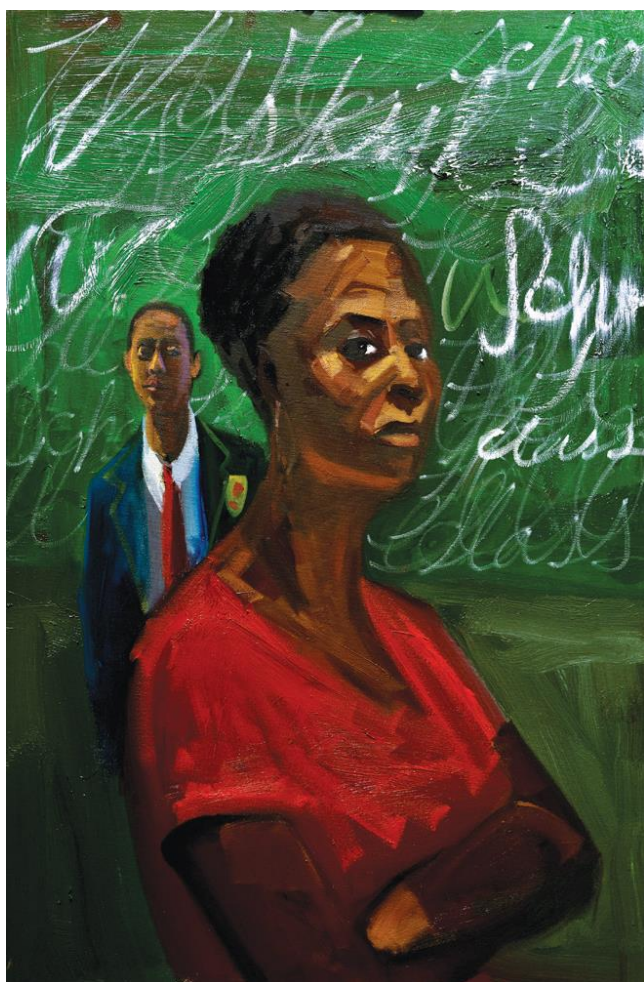
and CICF PRESENT

Pipeline

by **Dominique Morisseau**

October 16 –
November 11, 2018

on the IRT's
Upperstage



STUDY GUIDE

edited by Richard J Roberts, Resident Dramaturg
with contributions by Janet Allen
Raelle Myrick-Hodges • Junghyun Georgia Lee
Ari Fulton • Justin Hicks • Reuben Lucas
Randy Pease • Eden Rea-Hedrick

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NAVIENT

PIPELINE BY DOMINIQUE MORRISEAU

Nya's son, Omari, is tormented with rage and in trouble at school. A fractured family navigates a broken system as a mother fights for her son's future in a world divided by race, class, and money. Compassion and eloquence galvanize this gritty new work by one of America's most sought-after playwrights.

In *Pipeline*, students will get an eye-opening perspective on the American education system. Through poetic dialogue we see a mother and son fight for a way out of the school-to-incarceration cycle while sharing the total humanity of everyone involved. This Off-Broadway hit tackles numerous issues of prejudice and privilege through the eyes of young people, and the adults trying to protect them. *Pipeline* will encourage your students to begin a conversation and build understanding of polarizing perspectives.

STUDENT MATINEES 10:00 AM on October 23, 24, 25, 30, & 31, & November 1, 2018

ESTIMATED LENGTH Approximately 90 minutes

AGE RANGE Recommended for grades 9-12

CONTENT ADVISORY

Pipeline is a modern drama that contains strong language throughout and some adult situations. A script preview is available upon request.

STUDY GUIDE CONTENTS

Synopsis	3
Executive Artistic Director's Note	4
Director's Note	5
Designer Notes	6
"We Real Cool"	7
<i>Native Son</i>	8
<i>Invisible Man</i>	9
Playwright Dominique Morisseau	10
The School-to-Prison Pipeline	12
Alignment Guide	13
Discussion Questions	14
Writing Prompts	15
Activities	16
Resources	17
Glossary	18
The Role of the Audience	21

COVER ART BY

KYLE RAGSDALE

STUDENT MATINEES, ARTIST IN THE CLASSROOM, & YOUTH AUDITIONS

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THE STORY OF *PIPELINE*

Nya is a divorced mother and public high school teacher trying her best to raise her teenage son on her own. Her son, Omari, is a bright but very angry young man who struggles to fit in at his expensive private school, Fernbrook Academy. When an altercation with a teacher becomes physical, Omari faces expulsion or worse. He tells his girlfriend, Jasmine, about his plan to run away from school.

Meanwhile, Nya discusses the situation with her coworkers at the public high school, fellow teacher Laurie, who has just returned from a three-week leave for reconstructive surgery after being attacked by the family of a student, and security guard Dun, whose friendliness Nya is quick to rebuff. After a stressful day at school, Nya drives to Fernbrook to pick up Omari. She finds him gone and talks to Jasmine instead, urging her to reveal where Omari has gone. Jasmine initially refuses, but at last tells Nya truthfully that she knows Omari has run away, but not where he has gone. That night, however, Omari returns home of his own accord. Nya and Omari try to talk about what happened, but they are unable to find any resolution. Nya tells Omari she needs instructions for how to help him, but he has nothing to offer.

The next day, Omari's father, Xavier, comes to talk with Nya about Omari's future. They decide to pull Omari out of Fernbrook and send him to live with Xavier. After another stressful day at school that involves Laurie hitting a student with a broom and facing the loss of her job, Nya breaks down with a panic attack that sends her to the hospital. In the hospital waiting room, Omari and Xavier confront one another over their difficult relationship. Nothing improves, and Xavier walks away, leaving Omari with Nya. In the play's final scene, Nya pleads with the school board not to press charges against Omari, while Omari presents his mother with a list of instructions to improve their relationship.



*Cole Taylor &
Renika Williams in
the IRT's production
of Pipeline.
Photo by
Zach Rosing.*

WRESTLING WITH THE SYSTEM

BY JANET ALLEN, EXECUTIVE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

We are delighted to introduce the force that is Dominique Morisseau to our Indiana audiences with this production of *Pipeline*. A native of Detroit, Ms. Morisseau has enriched our American dramatic literature landscape with a dozen wide-ranging plays that refract the American race experience with a sharp and insightful voice. When I saw *Pipeline* at Lincoln Center in the summer of 2017, I was literally breathless with the strength of the narrative, the clarion cry of the characters, and above all, the impact of the story itself. Her ability to capture so many pulsing human intersections in a swift 90 minutes without ever getting polemic was so vivid and timely that I couldn't wait to make a production of this play for our Indiana audiences. The way she has created this piece of theatre makes it very hard to turn away, certainly harder than turning off the television or moving to another less disturbing news story on your feed. Her art causes the content—content we all share responsibility for—to make us wrestle with, and potentially question, our own assumptions about race and education.

What Morisseau does in this play is land the audience in the middle of some of America's most important issues about young people, particularly young people of color: how do we educate them, how do we care for them, how do we protect them, how do we prepare them? Even these questions point to one of the problems the play identifies: in trying to create systems that will help children thrive, we reduce them to a population, a cohort, a group to be dealt with, rather than a unique set of individuals, each with his or her own unique challenges. The student in this play, Omari, is entirely himself, not just a construct of his time, his generation, his color, his economic status, his family background. And yet how often do we reduce children to statistics, to data points about graduation rates, test scores, college entrance access? Parents and teachers of all socioeconomic positions and races battle with these concerns daily, trying to do the best they can for their students in a system that seems rigged for failure. These are some of the primal questions Morisseau raises in this breathtaking play.

It isn't often that a play comes along with such a superb blend of craft and social content, a blend that impacts and informs us while staying true to itself and its art. And yet the layers of social issues that the play touches and enlightens are extraordinary: not only about education, but about friendship, about love, about economic class, about race, about institutions, about aging, about economic mobility, about family—the list could go on and on. What I hope above all is that we can't stop thinking about it and talking about it, that the play penetrates our thinking and our emotional lives as no news story can, and that it helps us see, with greater clarity, how we are each a part of the social fabric that has such negative impact on this unique child.

Aimé Donna Kelly, & Toussant Jeanlouis in the IRT's production of Pipeline. Photo by Zach Rosing.



SCHOOLED

BY RAELE MYRICK-HODGES,
DIRECTOR

It is very easy to “discuss” the complexity of America’s public school system as an outsider. It makes for great intellectual conversation. But we don’t discuss the stress on students and teachers and parents enveloped by this system.

I went to public school. And, I come from a family of school teachers (the job that black women with college degrees could get during segregation). I have been given the textbook that didn’t have a front cover, yet at the end of the year, I was expected to pay \$75 for the “evident damage” while it was in my possession. I had a grade school teacher so bigoted that she took to calling me “Black Nina” to separate me from the other two girls in my class named Nina. (That is when I started calling myself Raelle—my middle name—because “Black Nina” seemed so uncomfortable). I watched a public high school math teacher have a nervous breakdown in front to a classroom.

And I hated being in school because of the system I endured. “School” never rubbed off on me, because I always felt that my teachers—*none* of whom were teachers of color—made extensive assumptions about my capacity and my family history.

They were too overwhelmed to be diligent in the necessary care needed to educate young people. School is the big scorecard of the privilege line in this country. And those of us subjected to the subtle economic bias, ethnic bigotry, and emotional exhaustion of its teachers—well, it left me little to take from this system aside from its need to be overhauled.

I would not have made it out of school without the tenacity of an extremely well-educated mother who had the time—with support of *her* family—to focus my studies. So, I dedicate this production to all the parents, students, and teachers who endure the complexity of public education. And to my high school teacher Mrs. Mittleburger, who spent her own money on supplies, created the drama program for my school, and never missed a day of trying to make great adults from little humans.

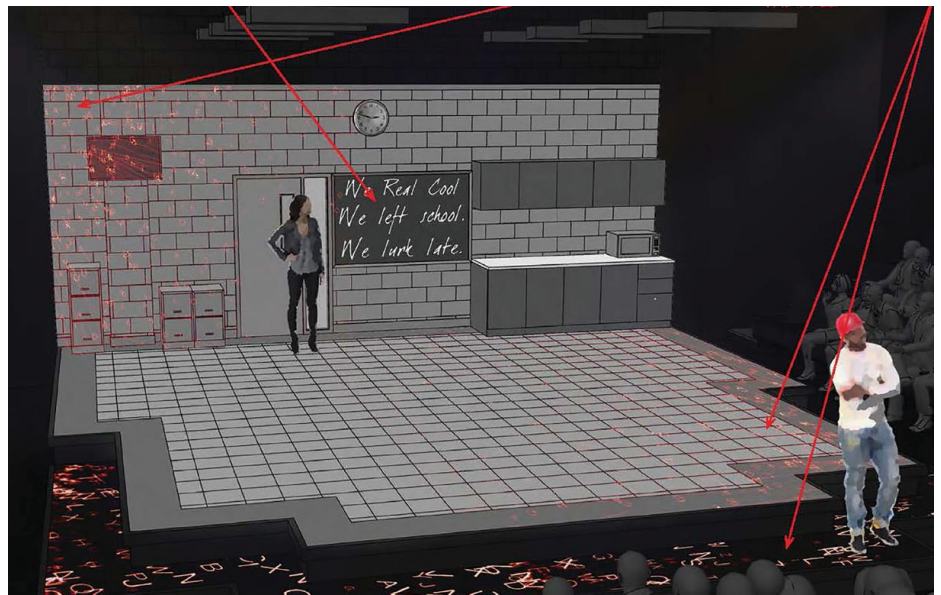


*Aimé Donna Kelly, & Cole Taylor in the IRT's production of Pipeline.
Photo by Zach Rosing.*

CLASS ROOMS

JUNGHYUN GEORGIA LEE SCENIC DESIGNER

To support the storytelling, I focused on delineating the safe places and the unsafe places. A teachers' lounge tucked away in a heavy concrete school building is a safe, familiar place. That room shares the stage with a small dorm room and the corner of Nya's living room. But we also see, woven into the known places, the dark and unknown places, where Nya's child might be.



Preliminary rendering by projection designer Reuben Lucas.

ARI FULTON COSTUME DESIGNER

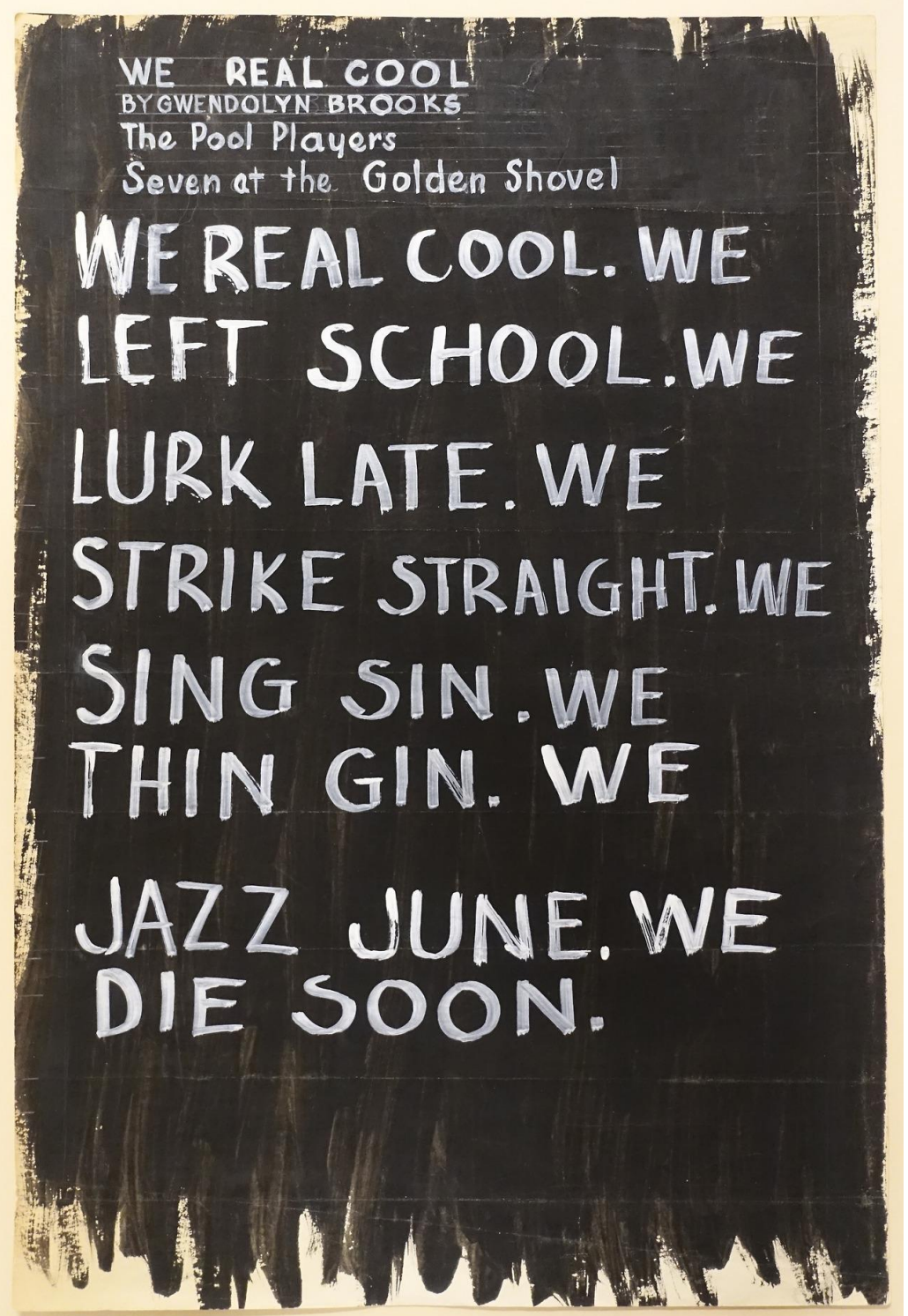
Perception and surveillance are two themes the design team talked about incorporating into our production of *Pipeline*. I am interested in how the characters present themselves when faced with the reality that they are constantly watched and judged against racial stereotypes. In designing *Pipeline*, I was interested in how characters use fashion as a means both to fit in and to stand out. For example, the students Omari and Jasmine wear uniforms, which by design, are markers of assimilation; but they break with conformity in the styling of these uniforms, as well as in their hair and shoes. Within the characters' strict dress code, I wanted to find markers to express their humanity and help them reclaim their personal narratives.

JUSTIN HICKS COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

My entrance into this play is through the poem "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks. My mother taught me the poem when I was about ten years old. The use of the poem in the play brought up memories of adolescence and reminded me of many women I knew who were mothers as well as teachers. It also comments on the fragility of the bond between a mother and a teenage son who's reaching toward manhood. Another source of inspiration for me has been the presence of young men of color in the news, and various situations where they've been singled out both as victims and antagonizers. This play seats us in the world of a young man and makes us deal with the psychology of the prejudice inflicted on him and his fear of being perceived as something or someone other than who he is.

“WE REAL COOL”

Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000) was an American poet, novelist, and teacher, the first African American author to win the Pulitzer Prize. She served as poetry consultant to the Library of Congress in the 1980s and was Poet Laureate of her home state of Illinois from 1968 until her death. Her work frequently focuses on the personal struggles and celebrations of ordinary people. She remains today one of the most widely read and anthologized American poets. Brooks wrote “We Real Cool” in 1959. It was included in her 1960 poetry collection *The Bean Eaters* and became her most famous work.



*In 1966, Detroit's
Broadside Press reprinted
"We Real Cool"
in this design by
Cledie Taylor.
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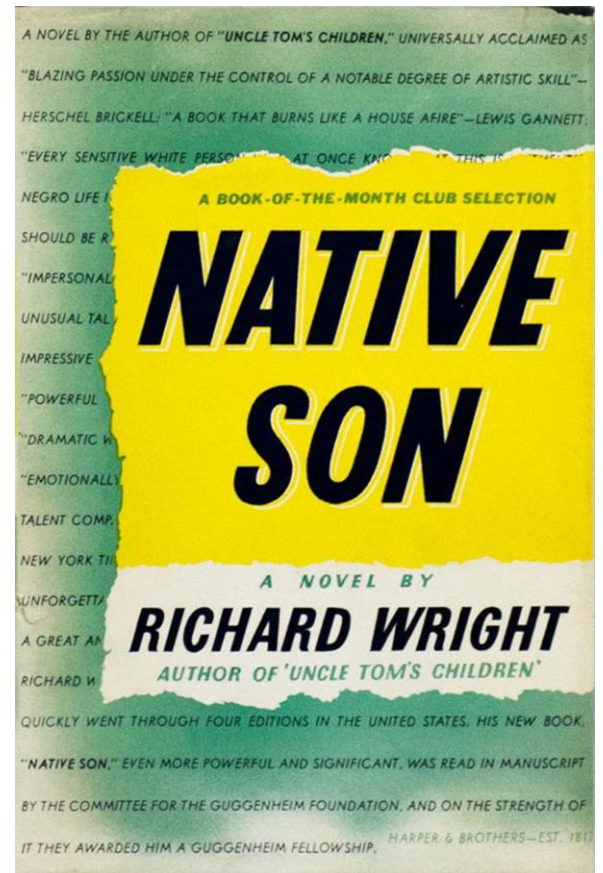
NATIVE SON

African American novelist, poet, and non-fiction author Richard Wright (1908-1960) published *Native Son* in 1940. The novel tells the story of Bigger Thomas, a black youth living in poverty on the south side of Chicago in the 1930s. Bigger is employed as a chauffeur by the wealthy white Dalton family. One night when their daughter Mary gets drunk, Bigger tries to put her to bed and accidentally smothers her. He panics and tries to destroy the body in the furnace. When his deed is discovered, Bigger and his girlfriend Bessie go on the run, but Bigger soon murders Bessie to keep her from talking to the police. After a wild rooftop chase, Bigger is eventually caught by the police; at the end of the novel he is tried, convicted, and sentenced to death in the electric chair.

While not apologizing for Bigger's crimes, Wright's book portrays a society that seems to make such tragedies inevitable. Bigger's lawyer argues that there is no escape from this destiny for his client or any other black American, because they are the necessary product of the society that formed them and has told them since birth exactly who they were supposed to be. In his essay *The Fact of Blackness*, philosopher Frantz Fanon wrote, "Bigger Thomas acts. To put an end to his tension, he acts, he responds to the world's anticipation."

A groundbreaking bestseller at the time of its publication, *Native Son* was one of the most successful early attempts to explain the racial divide in America in terms of the social conditions imposed on African Americans by the dominant white society. In his 1963 essay "Black Boys and Native Sons," literary and social critic Irving Howe wrote, "The day *Native Son* appeared, American culture was changed forever. No matter how much qualifying the book might later need, it made impossible a repetition of the old lies ... [and] brought out into the open, as no one ever had before, the hatred, fear, and violence that have crippled and may yet destroy our culture."

Novelist and social critic James Baldwin wrote, "No American Negro exists who does not have his private Bigger Thomas living in his skull." But Baldwin and other prominent African American writers also criticized the book for its one-dimensional portrayal of Thomas's character. Wright wanted his novel to educate readers about the black experience in the ghetto, and he exaggerated his characters with the intention of gaining the sympathies of white people. Many readers instead felt that the book perpetuated stereotypes of African Americans with little to no benefit. Nonetheless, *Native Son* remains a staple in American high school curriculums, cited by many teachers for its effectiveness in fostering classroom discussion and dialogue. Both the Modern Library and *Time* magazine included the book in their respective lists of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. It is also included in the American Library Association's list of the 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books.



INVISIBLE MAN

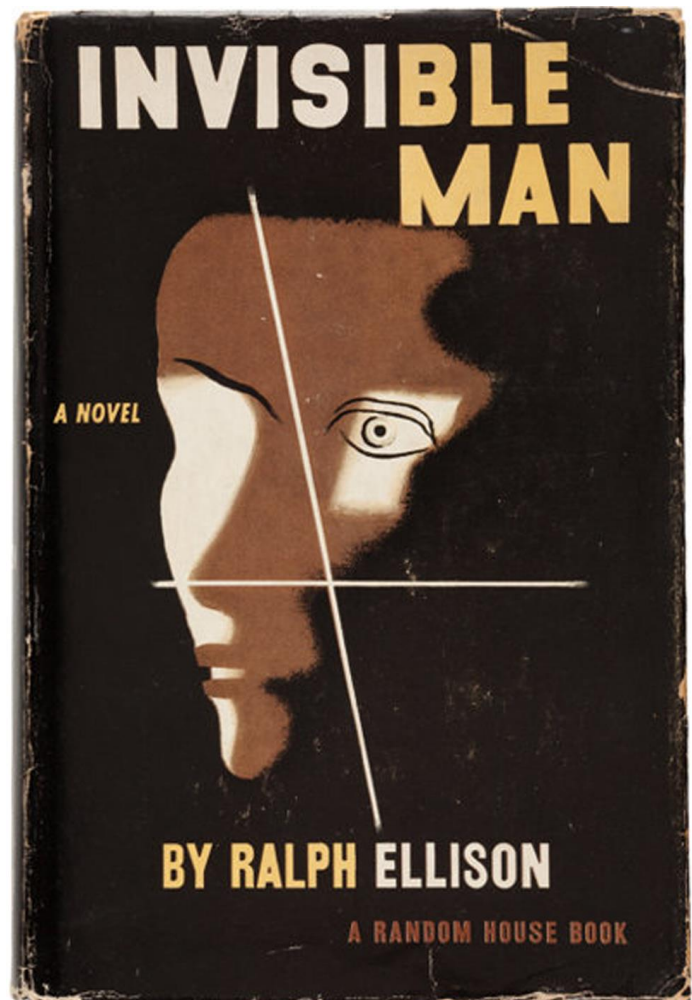
African American novelist, literary critic, and scholar Ralph Ellison (1913-1994) published *Invisible Man* in 1952. The novel explores issues that confront everyone who lives in the modern world: not only racism but personal identity, our frustrated impulse to assert ourselves in a world which is metaphorically blind. Ellison's hero is invisible within the larger culture because he is black, but his feelings can be understood by all those who experience the anonymity of modern life.

The novel's unnamed narrator hears his grandfather, a former slave, express anger towards the white-controlled system and advocate using the system against them. But he dismisses his grandfather's ideas, preferring to live a meek and obedient life as a model student at a southern black college. He is expelled, however, for inadvertently showing a white trustee the reality of black life in the South, including an incestuous farmer and a rural whorehouse. The college director chastises him: "... the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie! What kind of an education are you getting around here?" Mystified, the narrator moves north to New York City, where he soon discovers that his former headmaster's recommendation letters are, in fact, letters of condemnation.

The narrator finally gets a low-level factory job, where he is falsely accused of treachery by his supervisor and tricked into causing an industrial accident. At the company hospital, he is given unnecessary shock treatments. In his search for truth, he joins the Brotherhood, a band of social activists fighting for peaceful equality. Eventually, however, he learns that the Brotherhood is in fact intent on violent revolution and destruction. Forced into hiding, he nonetheless chooses to reject cynicism and hatred and to embrace a philosophy of hope.

In contrast to Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Ellison creates characters who are dispassionate, educated, articulate, and self-aware. The narrator is repeatedly mistaken for someone else: a minister, a pimp, a gambler, a unionist, a strikebreaker, a rapist, a lover, a doctor, a good singer. "I am an invisible man," he says. "When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me."

Invisible Man won the 1953 National Book Award for Fiction and was included by both the Modern Library and *Time* magazine in their respective lists of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century.



PLAYWRIGHT

DOMINIQUE

MORISSEAU

Dominique Morisseau was one of the top twenty most-produced playwrights in the United States in the 2015-16 season. Her play Pipeline was commissioned by Steppenwolf Theater and premiered at Lincoln Center Theatre. Her three-play cycle The Detroit Project consists of Skeleton Crew (Atlantic Theater Company), Paradise Blue (Signature Theatre), and Detroit '67 (Public Theater, Classical Theatre of Harlem, and National Black Theatre). Her other plays include Sunset Baby (LAByrinth Theatre), Blood at the Root (National Black Theatre), and Follow Me to Nellie's (Premiere Stages). She wrote the book for the new musical Ain't Too Proud—The Life and Times of the Temptations (Berkeley Repertory Theatre). She is an alumna of the Public Theater Emerging Writer's Group, Women's Project Lab, and Lark Playwrights Workshop, and has developed work at Sundance Lab, Williamstown Theatre Festival, and Eugene O'Neil Playwrights Conference. Her work has been commissioned by Women's Project, South Coast Rep, People's Light and Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and Penumbra Theatre. She recently served as co-producer on the Showtime series Shameless. She has received the Spirit of Detroit Award, PoNY Fellowship, Sky-Cooper Prize, TEER Trailblazer Award, Steinberg Playwright Award, Audelco Awards, NBFT August Wilson Playwriting Award, Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama, OBIE Award, and Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellowship, and she was named one of Variety's Women of Impact for 2017-18.



"I came to writing plays from being an actress," says Dominique Morisseau. "When I was at the University of Michigan I studied acting, but we weren't studying any writers of color or women, and on our stages we saw very few plays by writers of color or women. Honestly, I got frustrated with not seeing representations of myself, and I wanted to perform in some work ... so I wrote a play. It took on a life of its own, and the rest of the student body got behind it. Here was something that was bigger than just my need to perform. There was a voice that people were hungry to hear, and that changed something for me."

That “something bigger” has shaped Morisseau’s plays. “There is some sense of justice I am always seeking for my characters. How are they or are they not getting justice in their lives for the things that they want? How are they or are they not being measured fairly by each other and by the world? And how are they or are they not being considered by those who have status over them?”

The playwright has cited several inspirations for *Pipeline*. “I was reading Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, and I was really struck by the school-to-prison pipeline, and what it means to have people go straight from school right into prison—how you can systemically create that kind of structure, so that it’s not just individual, it actually becomes a way of socializing our community. I think that’s about policy. We put a lot of blame on public schools and public school teachers, but every time we call a teacher a failure, I’m saying: Who failed the teacher? Because everything has a trickle down.”

Morisseau knows the education system from the inside: not only was her mother a career-long inner-city public school teacher, but the playwright herself taught school for 16 years: in Detroit, where she grew up, and in all five boroughs of New York City. “There were incidents at my mother’s school, where a teacher had to hide in a classroom from young parents who would come up to the school furious because of the volatile environment of having to carry all of these things on your back, and then also feeling like your child is failing, and that the system is failing your child, and you really don’t know where to put the blame.”

Even closer to home, a young friend of Morisseau’s, a surrogate nephew, had an incident at school that was quickly vilified online and in the press. “It shocked me and concerned me how quickly we criminalize and don’t give second chances to young men of color, and particularly young African American men.”

Morisseau’s play looks at challenging issues that don’t have easy solutions. “I’m not so arrogant to think I have all the answers. I don’t have them. I have none. These are the things that stay on my mind all the time. These are things that I wrestle with and I’m trying to work out. There are some things I think I know, but I don’t know the full extent of it. In *Pipeline*, I do know that there are structural and cultural failures in both the private and public schools, so I know that there is a pipeline that our students are being sucked into. I do know that, and I do know that it’s going to take some work and some recalibrating how we look at education and who we’re listening to when we talk about education. I know those things for sure. What I don’t know is how we do all that. I feel like if I ask the important questions that I have around it, maybe, collectively, as a society, we will start to have the kind of conversation that can find a solution.”

Morisseau is careful to point out that the situations seen in *Pipeline* could happen anywhere; in the script, she notes that the play’s setting can be “any inner city environment where the public school system is under duress.” She hopes her work will be a dialogue with a wide audience. “I want a white working-class family to see themselves in a black working-class family. Or white teachers, teaching in a predominantly black environment, with mostly black and Latino workers. If we can see ourselves in each other like that, then maybe we would know that we have much more common ground than we think we do.”

THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

Over the past 20 years, the term “school-to-prison pipeline” has been used to describe how harsh school disciplinary policies and law enforcement policies work together to feed young people into the criminal punishment system.

Researchers have found that excessive suspensions and expulsions lead to various negative outcomes for students, including dropping out of school—and studies have shown that high school dropouts are more likely to be incarcerated than those who graduate high school. In particular, black students are disproportionately disciplined in school—although statistics show that they do not actually misbehave more than their peers.



*Toussaint Jeanlouis, Cole Taylor, & André Garner
in the IRT's production of Pipeline.*

This trend can be traced back to the Columbine school shootings in 1999. Since then federal and state laws have instituted zero-tolerance policies that assign “explicit, predetermined punishments to specific violations of school rules, regardless of the situation or context of the behavior.” At the same time, in the streets, the war on drugs has led to more punitive criminal legal responses, such as three strikes and mandatory minimum sentencing.

Police officers in schools play a critical role in this pipeline. In 1975, only one percent of U.S. schools reported having police officers; today, most urban schools have police on site. In New York City, public schools employ more cops than counselors. Many schools also have metal detectors and surveillance cameras under the pretext of keeping students safe.

The presence of police officers in schools often leads to harsher, sometimes brutal treatment of students. According to a 2011 report from the Justice Policy Institute, “when schools have law enforcement on site, students are more likely to be arrested by police instead of discipline being handled by school officials. This leads to more kids being funneled into the juvenile justice system, which is both expensive and associated with a host of negative impacts on youth.”

The realization that zero-tolerance policies in schools have led to criminalization and incarceration for students of color, and especially black students, has prompted calls for restorative justice and other, less punitive discipline practices. Some advocates say that the best way to prevent future incarceration is to invest on the front end in providing excellent educational opportunities for all. The outlook for such investment, however, is bleak. Nationally, since 1990, spending on prisons has increased three times as quickly as spending on education.

ALIGNMENT GUIDE

Seeing a performance at Indiana Repertory Theatre is a great way to help make connections for students and facilitate their understanding of a text. Some key literature standards to consider on your trip would be:

READING - LITERATURE

- RL.1 – Read and comprehend a variety of literature independently and proficiently
- RL.2 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by analyzing, inferring, and drawing conclusions about literary elements, themes, and central ideas
 - Sample: 9-10.RL.2.2: *Analyze in detail the development of two or more themes or central ideas over the course of a work of literature, including how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details.*
- RL.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature, using knowledge of literary structure and point of view
 - Sample: 11-12.RL.3.2: *Analyze a work of literature in which the reader must distinguish between what is directly stated and what is intended (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement) in order to understand the point of view.*
- RL.4 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by connecting various literary works and analyzing how medium and interpretation impact meaning

READING - NONFICTION

- RN.2 – Extract and construct meaning from nonfiction texts using a range of comprehension skills
 - Sample: 8.RN.2.3: *Analyze how a text makes connections and distinctions among individuals, events, and ideas.*

READING - VOCABULARY

- RV.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature and nonfiction texts by determining or clarifying figurative, connotative, and technical meanings
 - Sample: 9-10.RV.3.3: *Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BEFORE SEEING THE SHOW

Discuss the school-prison pipeline with your students (see page 12). What other pipelines are part of their world? How difficult is it to challenge the negative expectations of others?

AFTER SEEING THE SHOW

How has seeing the play altered students' feelings about the pipeline concept? How can we find positive ways to challenge the negative expectations of others?

Compare and contrast Fernbrook Academy, where Omari and Jasmine attend, with Chadsey High, where Nya teaches. What different kinds of challenges do the students and administrations of the two schools face? What similarities in either or both schools do you see in your own school?

Toward the end of the play, Laurie expects to lose her job after hitting a student with a broom to stop him from beating another student. Do you think Laurie deserves to lose her job? Why or why not? What could she have done differently? What would you have done if you were in Laurie's situation?

In the stage directions of *Pipeline*, playwright Dominique Morriseau describes Jasmine as "in touch with the poetry of her own language." Consider the role of language in the play. How is the way Jasmine speaks different from the way other characters speak? How do all the characters speak differently from each other? (For instance, how does Nya speak differently from Dun? from Laurie? from Omari?) What does the way each character speaks reveal about him or her? What does the way you speak reveal about you?

Three major works of African American literature are discussed in *Pipeline: Native Son* by Richard Wright, *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, and "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks. Have you read any of these works (or any other works by these authors)? How are the themes and concerns of these works similar to the themes and concerns of *Pipeline*? How are they different? If you have not read any of these works, might seeing *Pipeline* make you more interested in reading them? How do you think having seen *Pipeline* first might influence your reading of these texts?

Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "We Real Cool" is repeated many times throughout the play, almost like a soundtrack for the play's emotions and themes. How does the poem serve to highlight the feelings and ideas in the play? Does your life have such a soundtrack? What songs or poems do you listen to or re-read most often? How do they reflect important themes or experiences in your life?

Omari's classmates record him shoving his teacher, and Omari tells Jasmine he is afraid the video will go viral. The incident in which Laurie hits a student with a broom is also recorded. Video surveillance is part of this production's ambient design. Consider the ways in which internet culture and platforms such as YouTube have changed the way information is shared. How might Omari's situation look different without the technology that allowed his altercation with his teacher to be recorded? How might things be different for Laurie if students had not recorded her? How has the constant presence of phone cameras been helpful to our society? How has it been harmful?

ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY ONE

In *Pipeline*, one of the main conflicts is Nya and Omari's disagreement on when, if ever, it is acceptable for a student to opt out of participating in classroom learning.

NYA

A teacher is supposed to engage you. Even when you don't feel like it. That's the teacher's job, I've told you that repeatedly.

OMARI

We not talking a teacher doin' their job. We talkin' provoking. We talkin' agitating. We talkin' singling me out. You know that, Ma? On a day where... Where I don't FEEL like being singled out. We talkin' respecting my space.

NYA

You're in SCHOOL. You're not in your personal space. You're in a collective space. A space to engage and be questioned and be stimulated and be provoked. That is education, Omari.

OMARI

I'm talkin' biased education, Ma. I'm talkin' disrespect. He knows. He knows he wasn't... ..he was sayin' somethin'. Asking me. In that room. In that way. In front of all those students. On THAT issue. He was sayin' somethin' directly to me. I know he was.

Divide your class into two groups: Team Nya and Team Omari. Give students time in their group to discuss that character's perspective and create a list of arguments why they are right. After a time, have students summarize and present their arguments to the other side. After all arguments have been presented, ask students to choose whether they agree more with Omari or Nya. Have a full class discussion about why, and if their mind was changed because of the activity.

TIP: Check out the following links for different ways to format your discussions:

[Fishbowl](#)

[Socratic Seminar](#)

[Spontaneous Argumentation](#)

ACTIVITY TWO

Have your class engage in *Group Counting / Counting in the Dark*, a theatre game designed to encourage focused listening: [Instructions](#) | [Video](#)

After reflecting on that experience, try the activity again, this time using the text of "We Real Cool" found on page 7 of this guide. Once you've successfully accomplished it, talk about how it felt. Did your group find a rhythm for the poem? Did any of the lines elicit a different emotion hearing them read this way?

WRITING PROMPTS

Pipeline ends without telling the audience what happens next to the characters. Does the school board press charges against Omari, or not? Does he go to a new school? What does Nya do about her panic disorder? What happens to Jasmine? Write a scene that addresses these questions (or any other questions the play makes you want to ask). You can write your piece as a dramatic scene with dialogue and stage directions or as a short story.

Laurie makes reference to both the film *Dangerous Minds* and the actor Hilary Swank, whose film *Freedom Riders* has similar themes to *Dangerous Minds*. Watch one or both of these movies and compare the way they depict struggling schools and students and their teachers to the way these topics are depicted in *Pipeline*. Write a reflection on the themes in the movie(s)? How are they like *Pipeline*? How are they different? Which do you find more realistic? Why? Which one do you enjoy more? Why? Why do you think Laurie is upset by these films? Address those issues in your response.

At the end of the play, Omari makes a list of instructions for Nya to help mother and son communicate better with one another. Think of a person in your life with whom you have trouble getting along, and make a list of instructions to help you and that person improve your communication. Feel free to borrow some instructions from Omari's list, but come up with some of your own as well.

Write a review of the play. A well-rounded review includes your opinion of the theatrical aspects—scenery, lights, costumes, sound, direction, acting—as well as your impressions of the script and the impact of the story and/or themes and the overall production. What moments made an impression? How do the elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound work with the actors' performance of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not? To share your reviews with others, send to: education.irt@gmail.com

Constance Macy,
Cole Taylor,
Aimé Donna Kelly, &
Toussant Jeanlouis in
the IRT's production
of *Pipeline*.
Photo by
Zach Rosing.



RESOURCES

BOOKS

Native Son by Richard Wright

Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison

The Bean Eaters by Gwendolyn Brooks

—poetry collection that includes “We Real Cool”

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas

—young adult novel about an African American girl navigating the aftermath of her best friend’s fatal shooting by the police

Piecing Me Together by Renée Watson

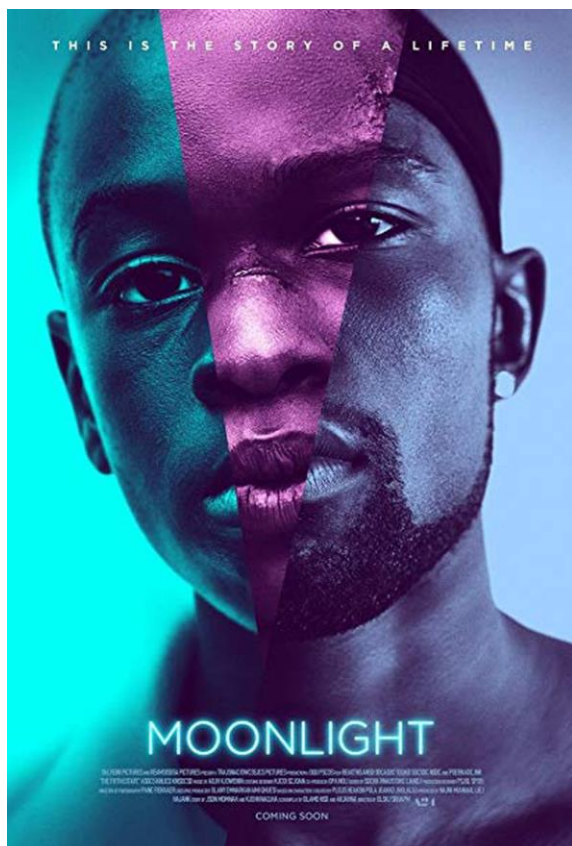
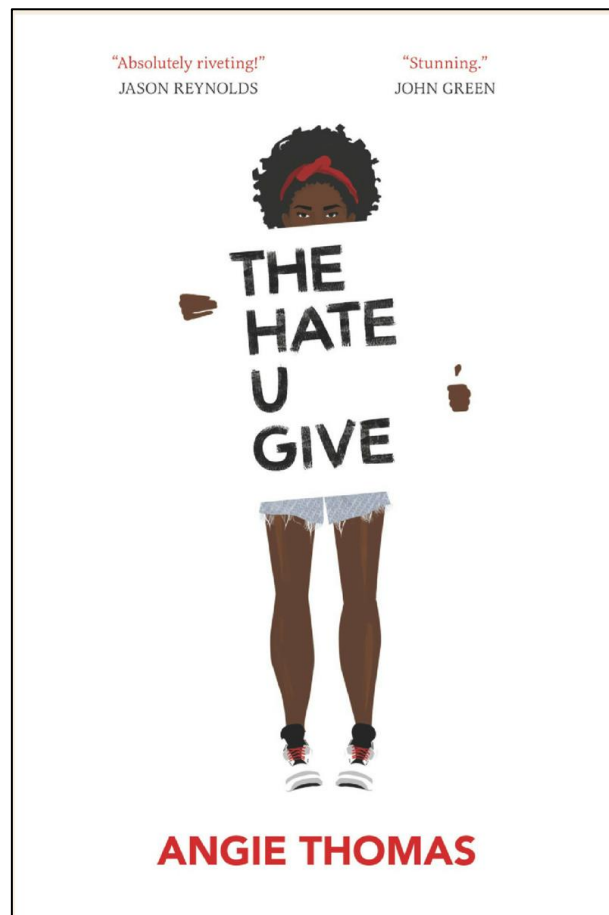
—young adult novel about an African American teen in a predominantly white private school

All American Boys by Jason Reynolds & Brendan Kiely

—young adult novel about two young men, one black, one white, confronted with the problem of police brutality

Black Boy White School by Brian F. Walker

—young adult novel about an African American teen from East Cleveland who attends a private boarding school in Maine attempting to navigate between two different worlds



TV & MOVIES

The Wire (2002-2008)

HBO television series (*mature language & themes*)

Moonlight (2016)

coming-of-age story about
a young African American man

Boyz n the Hood (1991)

drama about teens in
South Central Los Angeles

Dope (2015)

comedy-drama about a high school “geek”
from a troubled school who wants to go to Harvard

Do the Right Thing (1989)

comedy-drama about racial tensions
on a hot summer day in Brooklyn

ATL (2006)

comedy-drama about
high school seniors in Atlanta

GLOSSARY

Benz

Mercedes-Benz is a division of the German automotive corporation Daimler AG known for luxury vehicles. The brand's slogan, "The best or nothing," reflects its self-fashioned elite status.

Broadside Press

Broadside Press was founded in 1965 in Detroit and published many leading black writers including Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, and Margaret Walker. In 2015, it merged with another important publisher of black American writing, Lotus Press, becoming Broadside Lotus Press.

“broken English”

In its strictest definition, the term *broken English* refers to the use of English vocabulary with the syntax of a non-English speaker's native language, affecting such elements as word order, sentence structure, definite articles, and verb tenses. In literature, broken English has often been used to indicate the foreignness of a character, or that character's lack of intelligence or education. Poets, however, have also intentionally used broken English to create a desired artistic impression, or as a creative experiment writing somewhere between standard English and a local language or dialect.

Chadsey High

Playwright Dominique Morriseau says in her *Note about the Setting*: "Not necessarily NYC, but definitely modeled after it. Can be any inner city environment where the public school system is under duress." There was a real Chadsey High School in Detroit, Michigan, an urban school located about 4 miles west of downtown Detroit that operated from 1931 to 2009.

creepin’

A slang term for cheating in a relationship.

Crips and the Bloods

The Crips are a primarily African American street gang that have been active in Los Angeles since the 1960s. With an estimated membership of more than 30,000, the Crips are one of the largest and most violent gangs in the United States. They are known for their bitter rivalry with another predominantly African American gang, the Bloods. Founded in Los Angeles for the purpose of protecting its members from the Crips, the Bloods gang has since branched out throughout the United States, with loosely associated “sets” of Bloods around the country often differing significantly from one another in terms of clothing, operations, and political ideas.

Dangerous Minds

Dangerous Minds is a 1995 American drama film based on the memoir *My Posse Don't Do Homework* by LouAnne Johnson. The film stars Michelle Pfeiffer as a former Marine who becomes a teacher in an underprivileged high school where students are involved with gang violence and drugs.

HarperCollins

HarperCollins is one of the world's largest publishing companies, with publishing groups in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, India, and China.

Donny Hathaway

Donny Hathaway (1945-1979) was an American jazz, blues, soul and gospel singer, songwriter and pianist. His best-known composition is the holiday classic "This Christmas."

homegoing

A homegoing service is an African-American Christian funeral tradition marking the going home of the deceased to the Lord or to heaven.

lunar eclipse

A lunar eclipse occurs when the moon passes directly behind Earth and into its shadow. In order for this to take place, the sun, moon, and Earth must be exactly aligned, with Earth completely blocking the sun's light from the moon. The most recent was July 27; the next one will be January 31.

metamorphic rock

Igneous rocks are formed through the cooling and solidification of magma or lava. Sedimentary rocks are formed by the accumulation and cementation of fragments of earlier minerals and organisms. When either of these rocks is subjected to the intense heat, pressure, and mineral-rich fluids found well below Earth's surface, it is transformed into metamorphic rock. Recrystallization (the reorganization of atoms) leads to a profound change in physical properties and chemistry, transforming the rock into other mineral types, denser and more compact than the original rock. Different minerals often form in layers, giving many metamorphic rocks a striped appearance. Types of metamorphic rocks include marble, soapstone, slate, and lapis lazuli.

Moses

Moses is a major prophet in a number of religions including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith. He features in religious texts including the Bible, the Torah and the Quran. Moses is generally agreed by scholars to be a legendary rather than a historical figure.

Oldsmobile

Oldsmobile was an American car brand produced from 1897 to 2004. The brand's peak popularity occurred in the 1970s, when Oldsmobiles were widely regarded as highly reliable, practical vehicles.

panic disorder

Panic disorder is a psychiatric disorder in which debilitating anxiety and fear frequently arise without reasonable cause. Panic disorder is characterized by panic attacks, periods of being overcome by a fear of disaster in the absence of real danger.

poolhall

Poolhalls typically serve alcohol and sometimes food and offer a variety of other entertainments such as gaming machines, card games, and darts, in addition to pool tables.

Ritalin

Ritalin is a brand name of methylphenidate, a central nervous system stimulant often used to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy.

schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a mental disorder characterized by abnormal social behavior and failure to understand reality. Symptoms include false beliefs, unclear or confused thinking, hearing voices that others do not, reduced social engagement and emotional expression, and a lack of motivation.

semantics

Semantics is the branch of linguistics concerned with meaning. Semantics studies the relationship between signifiers (words, phrases, signs, and symbols) and what they signify.

Hilary Swank

Laurie likely mentions actress Hilary Swank because of her starring role in the 2007 film *Freedom Writers*, in which she portrays a white school teacher confronting issues such as gang violence that affect her non-white students.

Teacher's College

Laurie may be using this term to refer generally to any university department of education, or she may specifically have in mind the graduate school of education at Columbia University, which is formally known as Teachers College.

teen pregnancy

In 2015, the birth rate for women ages 15-19 in the U.S. was 22.3 per 1,000, an 8% drop from 2014 (a record low). However, the U.S. teen pregnancy rate remains substantially higher than that of other industrialized nations. In addition, there is a significant disparity in birth rates between different ethnic groups, with the birth rate for African American teens being nearly twice as high as that of non-Hispanic white teens. Only 50% of women of any race who give birth while in high school will go on to earn their high school diploma by age 22. Teenage mothers are also more likely to have lower school achievement, suffer from more health problems, have a higher chance of being incarcerated, and are more likely to be unemployed as adults than women who do not give birth in their teens.

West Indian

The Indies was a European colonial term for the lands of South and Southeast Asia, derived from the River Indus and used to connote parts of Asia under Indian cultural influence. After the first of the voyages of Christopher Columbus to the Americas, Europeans began to use the terms *West Indies* and *East Indies* to distinguish the Caribbean region from South and Southeast Asia.

***The Wire*, Season Four**

The Wire was a crime drama television series set and produced in Baltimore. The series, which ran from 2002 to 2008, focuses on Baltimore's drug scene while also exploring storylines concerning local government, schools, and the media. Season Four concentrated on the school system and was lauded by critics as one of the best seasons of American television ever produced.

THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

You, the audience are one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:

Leave mp3 players, cameras, mobile phones, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home.

You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text during the performance.

Food and drink must stay in the lobby.

The house lights dimming and going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.

Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.

Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.

Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.

Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.

Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call because this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.

