

Educator Resources



**SUMMERTIME,
AND THE LIVE
IS FAST**

The Gershwins'
Porgy and Bess

**THE TONY AWARD - WINNING
BROADWAY MUSICAL**

Apr 22 – Jun 1, 2014
Ahmanson Theatre

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Welcome

Educator Resources
The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess

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Center Theatre Group is excited to have you and your students join us for *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*. A great play raises questions about the human condition and a great educational experience allows students an opportunity to reflect upon those questions and begin to discover their own answers. To that end, the material in Center Theatre Group's Discovery Guide and Educator Resources raise questions: questions about the power of community, questions about authorship and representation, questions about the transformative power of love. Our goal is to provide you with a variety of entry points into *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*, so that you can choose what best suits you and your students.

The Educator Resources and Discovery Guide are companion pieces, designed to help you prepare your students to see the play and to follow-up after the performance with options for discussion, reflection and creativity.

We have organized the Educator Resources into the following sections:

Discovery Guide

The Discovery Guide provides students with background information about the play and the subject matter, as well as questions for individual reflection. Written to be student-driven, the Discovery Guide helps prepare your students for the performance.

About This Play

This section includes a scene-by-scene synopsis of the play to provide you with detailed information about the content and form of the play.

Comprehension

This section includes background information about the setting and subject matter of the play. We have selected the information that most directly connects to or informs what happens in the play.

This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the Discovery Guide. It can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.

Connections and Creativity

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives, and the world we live in. In addition, it provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express. Theatre activities are included that examine specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by the production. The questions, activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

We know the hard work and dedication that it takes to bring students to see theatre. These materials are designed to support you in making the most of that experience. We applaud your passion for sharing theatre with your students and thank you for sharing your students with all of us at Center Theatre Group. We look forward to seeing you at *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*.



601 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

About the play

The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess

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This section includes a scene-by-scene synopsis of the play to provide you with detailed information about the content and form of the play.

Scene-by-Scene

Act I, Scene 1

1935, Charleston, South Carolina. A warm Saturday evening.

The people of Catfish Row are gathered in the courtyard. Young mother Clara and her husband Jake sing “Summertime” to their baby boy. They’re interrupted by a boisterous group of men, ready for a game of craps. Sporting Life encourages them to put their money down as he sings “Nobody Knows When, The Lord is Gonna Call” and rolls the dice. Jake and the other men don’t want to play the game using Sporting Life’s dice. They tease him about being run out of New York City because of his cheating ways and warn him to play fair when Porgy joins the game.

Neighbor Robbins enters the courtyard, looking to relax after a backbreaking day hooking cotton. Jake offers him a job on his fishing boat, the Sea Gull. He accepts and gets ready to join the craps game, but his wife Serena strongly objects. The men of Catfish Row take Robbins’ side — he has a right to play after a long week of work. And they joke with Jake that he’d better teach his son not to be pushed around by a woman. The whole community — men and women — sing “A Woman is a Sometimes Thing.”

Porgy enters, ready to join the game. Right behind him, Crown and his girlfriend Bess enter. So Crown can’t hear, one of the men quietly teases Porgy about having a crush on Bess, a claim Porgy denies, singing, “I’m cripple from birth. God made me to be lonely.”

Crown and Bess approach the dice players. They buy a flask of alcohol from Sporting Life. As Bess takes a swig, the women of Catfish Row bristle, but Bess doesn’t care what they think. The craps game finally gets started. A few of the men take their turns; some win, some lose. Crown is already drunk, but he buys cocaine from Sporting Life anyway despite Bess’s objections. Crown becomes increasingly aggressive.

Porgy takes his turn with the dice and wins. Crown accuses him of cheating and grabs Porgy’s arm so he can’t pick up his winnings. The other men jump to Porgy’s defense — Porgy is not a cheater. Robbins takes the lead, and the fight between him and Crown — one drunk, the other high — intensifies. A crowd gathers, begging them to stop fighting, but too late — Crown stabs Robbins to death.

Serena screams and the crowd panics, fleeing in every direction. Bess orders Crown to get out of there before the police show up and take him away. He goes, but tells her to make no mistake — as soon as things die down, he’ll be back for her.

Shaken up, Bess accepts a hit of cocaine from Sporting Life. He offers to take Bess in, but she scornfully refuses, saying “I ain’t come to that yet.” The police sirens are getting closer. Bess calls out for someone to help her. Porgy opens his home. She goes into his apartment moments before the police arrive.

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Act I, Scene 2

The residents of Catfish Row gather in Serena and Robbins' home to pay their respects. Robbins' body lies peacefully on a table. Mourners drop coins into a tea saucer resting on his chest, donations to help Serena pay for funeral costs.

Porgy and Bess approach, but Bess is reluctant. She knows how everyone feels about her, especially since she was with Crown before he killed Robbins. Porgy reassures her — as long as she's with him, everything will be fine. Together, everyone prays and sings, "Everybody helping now, sending our brother to heaven. Lord, oh Lord, send down your angels... Lord will fill the saucer 'til it overflow."

The Detective and the Policeman arrive and suspiciously look over the gathered mourners. They remind Serena that if she doesn't bury Robbins in 24 hours, the Board of Health will turn his body over to the local medical school. They then accuse Jake of killing Robbins, and start to beat him up. Before too much damage can be done, Porgy tells them it was Crown. They've got a name, so they leave the mourners to their vigil.

Full of sorrow, Serena sings, "My Man's Gone Now." Her friends and neighbors sing with her, dropping the few coins they have into the saucer. In the end, they're only able to raise fifteen dollars, not nearly enough for a burial. But mercifully, the undertaker agrees to perform the burial anyway. Feeling some relief, Bess leads everyone in singing, "Leaving for the Promised Land."

The mourners take Robbins' body away, leaving Porgy and Bess alone. He asks her to stay with him. Happily, she agrees.

Act I, Scene 3

A month has passed. Singing "Long Pull to Get There," Jake and his crew are getting the Sea Gull ready to take out to sea the next day. Meanwhile, Mariah organizes the women in their preparations for the community picnic taking place that afternoon. Clara is worried; this is a bad time of year for hurricanes.

Porgy joins the group. Men and women all comment on how good he looks, like a new man — he's in love! Jokingly, Porgy sings his reply, "I Got Plenty of Nothing." Bess has brought happiness to Porgy's life, but Serena is skeptical — she still thinks Bess is bad news. Sporting Life shows up, ready to sell cocaine to anyone willing to buy it. Mariah stops him. She'll put up with him selling alcohol around her restaurant, but she draws the line at drugs. She threatens Sporting Life with her song, "I Hate Your Strutting Style" — if he doesn't keep his distance, he'll regret it.

Impressed, Porgy calls Mariah "The Law of Catfish Row" and calls on her to perform some official business — Bess's divorce from Crown. For \$1, Mariah pronounces Bess divorced and sings, "Good day to you, Missus Porgy!"

As the others gather their picnic baskets and head off to the picnic grounds on Kittiwah Island, Bess is left alone. Sporting Life seizes the opportunity to proposition her once

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again, this time by reminding her that the two of them are different from these “small town suckers.” They’ve been to the city; they know how life really works. He offers her cocaine, and just when she begins to give in, Porgy returns and orders Sporting Life to leave her alone. Sporting Life agrees to go, but warns, “Your men friends come and they go, but remember Old Sporting Life and the Happy Dust will always be waiting.” To comfort her, Porgy sings, “Bess, you is my woman now.” She responds, “We is one now.”

The rest of Catfish Row is eager to get to the picnic. At first, Bess wants to stay at home with Porgy, but he insists she join the others. She’s a part of the community now; she should enjoy it. Mariah welcomes her, and she heads off to the island.

Act II, Scene 1

Kittiwah Island. Everyone is having a wonderful time, eating, singing, dancing. Sporting Life is there too, selling his wares. But in deference to Mariah, today it’s only alcohol. Serena warns the children to stay away from him, that they reap what they sow. Sporting Life disagrees with his song, “It Ain’t Necessarily So” — life just isn’t that simple, and things aren’t always what they seem.

Full of joy, full of food, and some equally full of alcohol, the picnickers start to gather their things to catch the boat back to Catfish Row. Bess has had a wonderful time, and she thanks Mariah for being so kind. Mariah says, encouragingly, “You’re trying to be a part of things, so I want you to feel welcome.”

The boat whistle blows. Mariah and Bess head towards it, but Bess turns back to get Mariah’s hat. When everyone else is out of sight, Crown leaps out of the bushes. He’s been hiding on the island this whole time. He hasn’t forgotten Bess; he’s just been waiting for the right time to come get her. She says she’s done with him; she’s with Porgy now. He refuses to accept that, insisting she’s his, and always will be. She begs him to leave her alone — “What you want with Bess?” But he’s relentless. She gives in to him; they embrace passionately. The boat leaves Kittawah Island without her.

Act II, Scene 2

Before sunrise, Porgy stands at the dock waiting for Bess. She’s been gone all night. He’s worried, but he’s also excited — while she was gone, he got a new brace for his leg and now can walk as well as any man.

Jake and his crew are anxious to get the boat out on the water. But Clara is still worried and encourages him to be careful. As he and the men head off toward the Sea Gull, Bess enters. At low tide, she’s walked all the way back from the island. She can barely stand, her clothes are in tatters, her feet are blistered and her face is burned. She can’t stop shaking and is raving feverishly. Serena, Mariah, and Clara help Bess into Porgy’s house and tend to her, reassuring Porgy, too. Serena takes the lead in praying for Bess’s speedy recovery.

Time passes as Porgy sits vigil by Bess. The people of Catfish Row go about their business — selling strawberries, honey, crabs. Gradually, Bess recovers from her fever. She tells Porgy

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about being with Crown and that Crown has no intention of letting her go. He'll be back for her. Porgy tells her not to worry. If she wants to stay with him at Catfish Row, he'll protect her. She never has to feel afraid again.

Clara, however, is very afraid — a hurricane is rapidly approaching and the Sea Gull can't be seen. A few of the Sea Gull's crew members straggle into Catfish Row, but without Jake. He sent them back, but stayed to save the boat.

Act II, Scene 3

Everyone huddles together in Serena's home as the storm rages outside. They sing and pray through the thunder and lightning. Suddenly, there is a loud knocking at the door — Crown bursts into the room. He mocks them for being afraid and orders Bess to come with him. Jeering, he sings, "A red-headed woman... she got that thing that drive men wild."

Clara, distraught, ignores Crown's antics and rushes towards the door. The others try to stop her, but she must find Jake. She asks Bess to take care of the baby for her, and races out into the storm. Crown races after her, shouting at Bess, "I'm going out there to get Clara, and when I come back I'm going to get you!"

Act II, Scene 4

Dusk. The storm has passed. The residents of Catfish Row mourn the people they've lost. Alone outside, Bess soothes the baby by singing "Summertime." Crown approaches. Porgy sees him, and the men fight. Though Crown is stronger and although Porgy has a knife, Crown starts to get the better of him. When Porgy drops the knife, Bess rushes in and puts it back in his hand. With new strength, Porgy stabs Crown in the chest and again in the throat. Triumphant, Porgy yells, "Bess, you got a man now! You got Porgy!"

Mariah takes charge and orders the men of Catfish Row to get rid of Crown's body. She and Bess help Porgy wash Crown's blood off his face and hands.

Act II, Scene 5

The Detective and Policeman are back. They've discovered Crown's body, and they're convinced his killer is someone on Catfish Row. The most likely suspect is Serena, Robbins' widow. They question her, but she and two of her friends insist that she's been very sick, hasn't been out of bed for days, and none of them know anything about anyone being stabbed to death. The Detective knows it's useless to press them any further — they'll never break. He calls for Porgy, thinking he might be easier to get answers from. Porgy isn't intimidated and doesn't give anything away. The Detective tells Porgy he needs to come to the station — they need someone to identify Crown's body. There's nothing Porgy can do; he has to go with them.

Bess is distraught. Sporting Life makes it worse. He's sure Porgy will show his guilt the moment he sets eyes on Crown's body. The police will know he's a murderer and will lock him up for life. And after they do, they'll come for her; she was Porgy's accomplice, after all. But don't worry, he assures her; he knows what will make her feel better — Happy Dust. Bess is afraid, but she still has the strength to resist.

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Sporting Life won't give up. He tells her the good life, the happy, family life she imagined having with Porgy and Clara's baby — that's never going to happen. There's nothing for her in Catfish Row anymore. But she has another option. She can come with him back to New York City. In the song, "There's A Boat Leaving Soon," he promises her, "You and me can live the high life... and all your blues you'll be forgetting." She believes him. He offers her money and a vial of cocaine. She accepts both.

Sporting Life leaves her alone with the baby. At first she resists the urge to open the vial, but the temptation is too great. Mariah sees Bess rub the cocaine on her gums and silently takes the baby away. Defeated, Bess enters Porgy's empty house.

Act II, Scene 6

Three days later. The people of Catfish Row are still trying to repair the damage from the storm. The Detective and the Policeman drag Porgy into the courtyard and dump him onto the ground. When they leave, everyone runs to Porgy, worried. He assures them he's okay; he just wants to see Bess. He tells them that when he saw Crown's body, he just kept thinking about her. That's what got him through it without giving anything away.

Mariah has to tell him — Bess is gone. She went to New York with Sporting Life. He collapses, singing, "Oh, Bess, Where's My Bess?" His friends and neighbors gather around him, reassuring him that she wasn't any good for him anyway. He's better off without her. He should try to forget her. But he refuses to go on without her.

He demands someone give him his cane. When they try to discourage him from leaving, he is more insistent and angry. He calls them out, "The cripple can't hold Bess? That's what all you was always thinking... I've got to be with Bess. God help me, but I'm leaving Catfish Row." His neighbors at first turn their backs on him, but eventually sing with him as he makes his way down the road.

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Gullah, Geechee, and the Sea Islands —

Books

Africanisms and the Gullah Dialect by Lorenzo Dow Turner, c. 1949, University of South Carolina Press.

- The first book on the Gullah language; considered by some to still be the definitive resource.

Porgy: A Gullah Version by Virginia Mixson Geraty, c. 1990, Gibbs Smith.

- The original play by DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, translated into Gullah.
- In 1995, the play was performed at the Garden Theater in South Carolina.
- The production was taped for television. See sctvstore.org for details about the DVD.

Gullah Folktales from the Georgia Coast by Charles Colcock Jones, Jr., c. 2000, University of Georgia Press.

- First published in 1888, this is the first collection of Gullah folktales.
- Reissued with a forward by historian Susan Millar Williams.

The Black Border: Gullah Stories from the Carolina Coast (With A Glossary) by Ambrose Elliott Gonzales, c. 1922, The State Company.

- Reissued 1999 by Pelican Publishing Company

Websites and Online Resources

<http://gullahgeecheenation.com>

- Gullah/Geechee Nation Official website of the Gullah/Geechee National Headquarters

National Park Service, Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor:

<http://www.nps.gov/guge/index.htm>

- Information about History & Culture, as well as information about planning a visit to the area. You may also download an excerpt of the National Park Service Special Resource Study, “Gullah Geechee: History, Language, Society, Culture, and Change.”

Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor <http://www.gullahgeecheecorridor.org>

- The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance and Abolition at The MacMillan Center, Yale University

<http://www.yale.edu/glc/aces2/lessons/rosenstein.pdf>

- A teacher created lesson plan for 8th grade students called “The Gullah People of the Sea Islands” by Susan Rosenstein as part of the ACES/GLC TAH “Slavery and Freedom in American History and Memory” Grant.

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Map from the National Park Service (<http://www.nps.gov/guge/planyourvisit/directions.htm>) illustrates the boundaries of the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.



A detail of the South Carolina Sea Islands.

Connections and Creativity

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives, and the world we live in. In addition, it provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express. Theatre activities are included that examine specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by the production. The questions, activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

Cultural Mapping

Objectives

- Students will gain knowledge of similarities and differences in their classmates.
- Students will be introduced to *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* and begin to reflect on the play.

Exercise

Ask the students to move the desks to the side and stand in a circle.

Describe the room as a map of the world. Identify Los Angeles in the space.

Have students who were born in Los Angeles gather in that place. Have the other students group themselves according to their birthplace (north, east, south or west of Los Angeles).

Have each group determine two additional things that they have in common. Report back to the whole class. (Example: *The members of the "north" group all like pizza and are the oldest in their families.*)

Repeat activity using other divisions: oldest, middle, youngest, only child; speak one language, two languages, etc.; most inspired by music, movement, image, language.

Quotes:

"Looking good ain't no crime!"

—*The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess*

Ef oona ent kno whe oona da gwuine, oona should know weh oona kim from.

If you don't know where you're going, you should know where you come from.

—*Gullah saying*

"And where you gonna stand when the sky comes a tumbling down..."

—*The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess*

"One of these mornings you're gonna rise up singing, then you'll spread your wings and you'll take to the sky."

—*The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess*

"The folks with plenty of plenty/Got a lock on the door."

—*The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess*

"About us... By us... For us... and near us."

—*W.E.B. DuBois*

Ask each student to stand by the quote that most intrigues them.

Discuss in the group why they chose that quote. What intrigues them about it?

Tableau/Frozen Picture

Objectives

- Students will practice using their bodies to communicate an idea or theme.
- Students will reflect on the varied interpretations of the theme.
- Students will reflect on *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* through a physical exploration of its themes.

Exercise

Divide students into pairs. Student A is the artist. Student B is the sculpture.

Have student A create a statue out of B on the theme of the “future.”

Examples: Flying cars, world peace, destroying the environment, graduating from college. Statues can be realistic or symbolic, personal or global.

Have each student title their statue and present to the class.

Repeat exercise with B as the artist and A as the sculpture.

Repeat with any of the following show-specific themes:
Shelter, Storm, Love, Community, Addiction, Journey.

Have each student sculpt an image that represents one of these themes.

Discuss what these ideas mean to your students and what these ideas meant in *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*. Are they similar or very different?

Shelter from the Storm

Objectives

- Students will explore the ideas of shelter and storm through writing, discussion, gesture, and movement.
- Students will relate their exploration to the themes of shelter and storm in *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*

Shelter

Definition: the state of being covered/protected from danger/bad weather
A structure that covers or protects, place of refuge

Derivation: middle english — sheltrun/sheldtrume — roof or wall formed by locked shields

Exercise

Through private writing or class discussion, ask the students to think about the word “shelter.” What are their initial impressions; what does it mean to them personally? Who provides shelter? What provides shelter? Who shelters you? What shelters you?

Through private writing or class discussion, ask the students to think about the word “storm.” What are their initial impressions, what does it mean to them personally? What literal storms come to mind? What might a storm be a metaphor for? What is “stormy” in their lives or communities?

In a large playing area, ask the students to “cover the space,” moving through the playing area without talking. Give them variations as they move, such as cover the space as if happy, sad, in love, or scared. Ask them to take up a lot of space and then a little space. Change tempo and levels.

Ask the group to freeze and close their eyes and think about shelter. How would they represent shelter through a physical gesture? Examples: holding a baby, praying, a hug, a rooftop. Have the students practice their “shelter” gestures.

In a circle, the first person shares his or her “shelter” gesture; next the second person repeats the first gesture and adds his or her own. The third participant does the first two gestures and adds his or her own gesture. Remind the group that they can help each other remember the gestures. Once everyone has added their gesture, the entire group repeats the entire shelter gesture phrase.

Repeat the above steps with “storm” and build a storm gesture phrase. How would you represent storm through a physical gesture? Examples: wind blowing, lightning striking, pushing against the elements.

Variation:

Have students share their storm and shelter gestures in sequence. What does it feel like when you juxtapose the two movements? Divide the class into smaller groups and have

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each group create a shelter/storm dance/physical story. Add in Gershwin's music from the hurricane scene in *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* to underscore the gesture stories. Share. Discuss the themes of shelter and storm in *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*. Who and what provides shelter for the characters? What literal and metaphorical storms are present in the story?

Soundscapes

Objectives

- Students will explore a specific place or setting through the sounds of the place.
- Students will compare the sounds of Catfish Row with the daily sounds of their own neighborhoods or communities.

Share the following quote:

“Ira Gershwin was a joyous listener to the sounds of the modern world. He had a sharp eye and ear for the minutiae of living. He noted in a diary: ‘Heard in a day: An elevator’s purr, telephone’s ring, telephone’s buzz, a baby’s moans, a shout of delight, a screech from a ‘flat wheel,’ car honks, a hoarse voice, a tinkle, a match scratch on sandpaper, a deep resounding boom of dynamiting in the impending subway, iron hooks on the gutter.’”

Orchestra:

Ask students to think about the sounds they hear each day. What is the first sound they hear in the morning? What do they hear next? Take them through an entire day in their communities or neighborhoods through sound.

Ask each student to pick one sound for morning in his or her neighborhood, a sound for afternoon and a sound for night. Have them create gestures that go with the sound. Each student should create a sound that he or she can perform—by singing, clapping, playing it on a rubber band or tapping on the floor—however each student chooses to perform it. Create a human orchestra. When you point to a student, or students, have them do their sound and motion. Have them practice getting softer, louder, faster, slower. Ask for a student to be the conductor/mixer of the soundscape, who will tell everyone when to come in, how loud to be, when to skip or fade out to create a soundscape of a day in the neighborhood. Conduct the soundscape.

Soundscapes continued...

Divide the class into groups of five people each.

Share the following quote:

“George Gershwin developed a series of sounds that all of the people in Catfish Row make as their morning starts. Somebody is snoring, someone is sawing wood, children are skipping rope, somebody’s beating an egg, someone’s hitting a rug. And it all becomes rhythm that builds up into a Charleston rhythm. It was written out in the stage manager’s score, because he was the one who got to rehearse it. This will be the first time it’s been heard live in 70 years.”

—*Conductor John Mauceri*

Using pictures in the Discovery Guide or images the students remember from the performance, have each group imagine and create a day in Catfish Row. What sounds would you hear in the early morning, in the afternoon or at night?

Have each group create a series of tableaux: a frozen picture for morning, for afternoon and for night on Catfish Row. Put the score and the tableaux together.

Share the sound scenes.

Setting: Where The Story Takes Place

Objectives:

- Students will explore place through physical behavior and the five senses.
- Students will explore their neighborhood communities and compare and contrast to the community of Catfish Row in *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*.
- Student will explore the idea of how a place feels from the inside and compare with how the place is viewed from the outside.

Materials:

Cards with setting/places listed on them. Examples: grocery store, beach, gym, hospital, church, library, and cemetery

Have a student pick a card and begin to non-verbally do an activity that would happen in that space. Example, pushing and filling a grocery cart.

Tell the students that when they know where the person is by what they see them doing; that they should join in with another non-verbal activity that happens in this place. Example: bagging groceries. See how many students you can get in the picture. Then freeze and ask the class at they should join in with. Example: bagging groceries. See how many students you can get in the picture. Then freeze and ask the class “where” they were. Repeat.

The Five Senses:

Ask students to think about a place that matters to them. On a piece of paper have them write three things they see, hear, smell, taste, feel in that place. Have students share some examples. Repeat with the 5 senses of Catfish Row. What sensory images do students remember?

Map Your Neighborhood:

Ask students to draw or somehow visually represent their favorite place (in the school, their neighborhood, in California.) Using your school as the center of the map, ask students to place their drawing north, south, east or west of the school. Take a walking tour. Stop at each drawing, and ask if the student wants to share their places and why they matter.

Inside/Out:

In groups, ask students to create tableaux of their schools or neighborhood communities from the inside. As a member of that community, what is most important to depict?

Next, have them create a second tableau; of their school or neighborhood community from an outside perspective. How do they think outsiders see this community?

Share the two tableaux and discuss.

In the same groups, have students create two tableaux of Catfish Row; one from an insider perspective and one from an outsider perspective. Share the two tableaux and discuss.

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“LOOKING GOOD AIN’T NO CRIME!”

—*Sporting Life*

“LUÇŋ ɟʊd əŋ ŋə ɟɾəm!”

(International Phonetics translation of Sporting Life’s line in a Southern accent.)

Above you see the literary translation of Sporting Life’s line, and below it, you see the phonetic translation of his line to depict a Southern accent. Notice how the languages are similar and how they differ.

It is worth noting that while *The Gershwins’ Porgy And Bess* sounds like it utilizes a Southern accent, it actually has a number of sounds from the Gullah dialect also spoken within what we usually consider a Southern accent. The Gullah language, contrary to the belief still held by some, is not poor, or broken English. Gullah possesses every element necessary for it to qualify as a language in its own right. Please refer to the Discovery Guide for more information about the Gullah community.

Students of today are not foreign to phonetics, and students are utilizing many sounds of the world as they are often speaking and learning more than one language.

A student’s spoken language exploration, conducted in a playful way, levels the playing field in the classroom. Getting your students breathing and warming up their voices together prepares them to validate their language abilities and the language abilities of their classmates. This inspires them to let go of self-consciousness and express themselves with confidence.

Objective:

- In the process of participating in this vocal warm-up and dialect unit, the students build confidence in themselves and their unique ways of expressing themselves.

Skills:

Listening, articulation, breath support for greater presence and presentation. This exploration supports a student’s cognitive development to hear and understand the nuances of spoken language and expression.

Duration: 20-30 minutes depending upon the amount of feedback and experimentation the class period allows. Finding your breath support is finding your confidence!

This warm-up sequence will support the increase of a student’s breath support, expressive/ speaking range and singing range.

Stretch First:

Stretch your arms long in front of the body and clasp your hands. Pull the arms away from the body to stretch open your back. Breathe and keep stretching for ten seconds. Keep your arms long and with your clasped hands draw figure eights in each direction and continue to breathe into your back.

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Clasp your hands behind you and stretch your arms long and downward to stretch your chest open. Breathe and keep stretching for 10 seconds.

Drop your arms to the sides and allow them to hang relaxed.

With knees slightly bent (do not lock the knees) and feet shoulder's width apart, chin first, begin to roll down the spine until you are hanging from the waist. (Some can touch the floor and some cannot. Within your own flexibility is just right.) Allow gravity to help you hang for a few moments, stretching the back of your legs, while allowing the head/neck and arms to hang free.

Roll up one vertebra at a time until the chin is the last to come up.

Repeat this sequence and roll down again to warm up the spine and stretch using gravity's help.

Quick and Safe Vocal Warm-ups:

Model for the students making a motorcycle sound by putting your upper front teeth on your lower lip and fueling this contact with the breath and voice to create friction; a "v" sound. Encourage the students to ride their imaginary motorcycles up and down their vocal range. Add a gesture as though they are holding onto their handle bars and changing gears. This is vocal yoga for the vocal chords, a wonderful way to begin warming up the voice. Moving about the space as though riding their motorcycles adds a sense of play and can encourage their sound making if they are a bit self-conscious.

Playfulness is wonderful encouragement towards your and the students' sense of freedom with their voice, overall expression, and ultimately, their empowerment.

Like the articulation warm-up above, model making a ghost sound of "O-u-u-u" as you rise in pitch and come back down. Encourage them to make the sound within their vocal range. They do not need to match your pitch. If they do, it is okay, but for those who are not in your vocal range, it might be useful to let them know their vocal ranges are just right. Try this several times.

Model for the students adding hand gestures as though they are ghosts to this "O-u-u-u" sound making. Try this several times.

Next, model using your body to reflect the ghost sounds by bending your knees and jumping up as you squiggle up and down. "O-O-O-O-O" as you squiggle up into a jump and land softly.

Now you have the body opened up enough to breathe deeper. This gets the breath moving and you can begin to really fuel the voice for speaking with more confidence.

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The “Y” Buzz by Arthur Lessac

Arthur Lessac was a very respected master voice teacher in the United States. He was a great model of living in the moment through breathing deeply. He lived to be over 100 years old. This “Y” Buzz technique is a basic activity to get the students focusing their voices to be heard and understood.

First lead the students in crinkling their noses.

Then, with plenty of breath, make the “y” sound in the word “Yes.”

Repeat the “y” sound numerous times so the students begin to feel the sound coming from their noses and above their front top teeth. They will feel like it is a nasal sound.

Then, with the nose still crinkled up, massage with two fingers of each hand, right above the cheek bones on both sides of the face. This begins to wake up the “mask” of the face. It is also a way for the students to “feel” where they are focusing their vocal sounds to come out when speaking.

Then, have them sustain the “y” sound as if they are saying the word “yes” only putting the “s” sound at the very end. Play with them sustaining for different lengths of time; four seconds, breathe, then, eight seconds, breathe, then sixteen seconds, and feel free to mix it up.

Now you are ready to have fun with making sounds that create a Southern accent.

Saucy Southern Spoken Here:

“Lookin’ good ain’t no crime!”

Use Sporting Life’s line (from above) to have fun speaking with a Southern accent.

Close your eyes and imagine you are dressed really stylish and you know it!

Find a gesture where you point out the fact that you know you look good.

Imagine you’re in Charleston, South Carolina and you have a Southern accent. No worries about being right or wrong for now. Just play!

Utilizing your gesture, try speaking this line with some real attitude and have fun! Speak the line again, with your gesture, and emphasize the word “good” and “crime.” Let these words sink down to the back of our mouth when you say them.

Have fun finding all of the ways you can color these words to express how good you look and how this is alright with you!

Open you eyes and take turns speaking this line to the person next to you.

Headed for the Promised Land

BESS: (From “Leaving For The Promised Land”)

**“OH THE TRAIN IS AT THE STATION
AND YOU BETTER GET ON BOARD
CAUSE IT’S LEAVING TODAY,
LEAVING TODAY, LEAVING TODAY.
OH I GOT MY TICKET READY AND THE TIME IS GETTING SHORT
CAUSE IT’S LEAVING TODAY,
AND WE’RE”**

BESS AND ALL:

“HEADED FOR THE PROMISED LAND.”

As in every play, the story opens and sets up many promises. In *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess* we enter a world of promises; promises made from character to character, promises made expecting honesty and hard work to pay off.

Let’s take a look at the elements of this play, the people, place and problems (3 p’s) and see what promises are made. After your students have come to the theatre to see the production, you can revisit and see if the play delivers its promises by the end.

Objectives:

- To enter into the world of the play by starting in the present and traveling back to the circumstances of *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*.
- To identify and explore the plot points and characters of *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*.
- To identify the promises that Suzan-Lori Parks and the original librettist, DuBose Heyward, set forth in the story through the characters and themes of the play.

Skills:

Listening, utilization of computer to research topics related to *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*. Identifying geographic locations, analysis of story, themes, and characters by identifying the people, place and problems (3 p’s) in the play. Discussion skills will be emphasized as well.

Duration

30-40 minutes depending upon how much time is available for classroom discussion.

Activity

Start by playing the YouTube video of Fantasia Barrino singing “Summertime.” Do not share the name of the song or artist at first.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGnakgGsiOY>

Poll the students to see if anyone has seen and or heard this song and artist.

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Introduce “Summertime” from the cast album of *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*. Share that this is the origin of this song. Play selections from the playlist in the Discovery Guide. Are these renditions the same? Different? In what ways?

Continue discussion, and share that this musical piece is the first song in the production and introduces where the play is set.

To begin the journey back in time, present a map and have the students identify their current location(s). Next, ask students to identify and travel on the map to Charleston, South Carolina. Has anyone ever been there? Notice the distance. Take guesses regarding the driving distance from Los Angeles to Charleston, South Carolina. It is approximately 2,497 miles, 4019 km.

Share images by searching for “Charleston, South Carolina now” on the Internet.
For example:

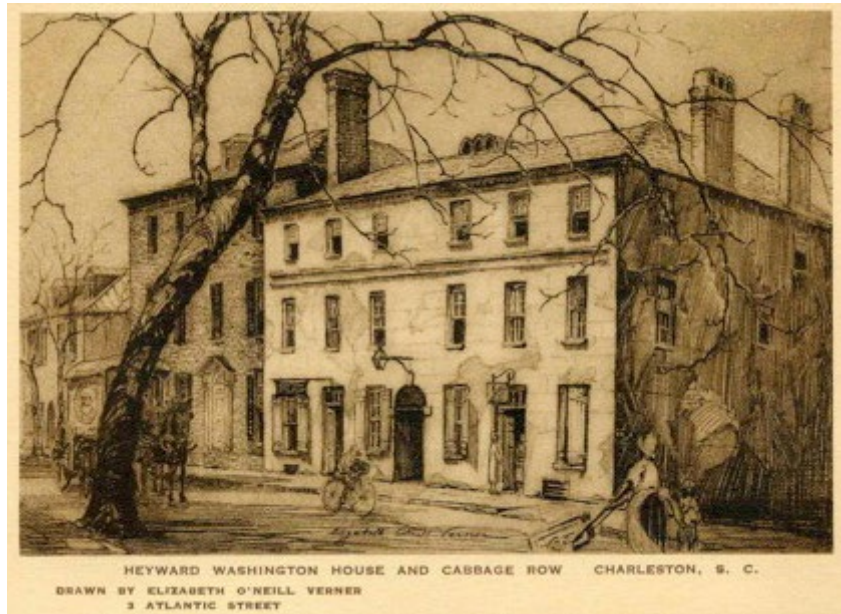


Search the Internet for “Charleston, South Carolina, early 1920’s”. For example:



Charleston City Hall, 1900s.

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Cabbage Row, Charleston, South Carolina, 1900s where
The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess begins with the song "Summertime."

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Present Production Stills regarding plot points and characters: Let them know that the fictitious setting of Catfish Row is based on the historical Cabbage Row.

Gambling Photo: Ask the students what they see.



The gathering of community? Men gambling, “rolling them bones.” Who are they and what are the problems and themes associated with each character? Are there promises expressed through these characters and themes? Are there promises from Sporting Life, from Crown, from Porgy? From the male characters in general? What is the role of a man in this community during this time period?

Picnic Photo(s): Ask the students what they see.



What are the women doing? Who are they, and what are the problems and themes associated with each character? Are there promises expressed through these characters and themes? Are there promises from Clara? From Mariah? From Bess? Are there promises associated

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with the female characters in general? Or are the female characters owed promises? What is the role of a woman in this community during this time period?



Discuss the physical and metaphorical theme of storms. Ask the students about storms. In *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*:

Have they experienced being in a storm? Physical weather and/or the weather of life?

Moonlight at the Battery; a fortified seawall at the Charleston Peninsula.



Mariah Photo: Ask the students what they see.

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Who is Mariah? What is her status in the community? Prepare the students to notice Mariah's function in the community when they see the play. Explore the idea and importance of "community" in Catfish Row. Look at the Gullah section in your Discovery Guide for information about the real-life community.

Porgy and Bess Photo: Ask the students what they see.



Who are they? Who are they to each other? What is each character's struggle? Without giving away the surprises of the play, discuss the love, protection and shelter they seek and offer each other.

Ask the students to keep this exploration in mind as they experience the production. What are the promises? Are they kept by the end of the play?

Re-visit these questions and themes in a post-show discussion/review of the production.

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Credits

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Center Theatre Group's mission is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

Education and Engagement

Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

Center Theatre Group's education and engagement programs advance the organization's mission in three key ways:

Audiences: Inspiring current and future audiences to discover theatre and its connection to their lives

Artists: Investing in the training, support and development of emerging, young artists and young arts professionals who are the future of our field; and

Leadership: Contributing to the community-wide efforts to improve the quality and scope of arts education in Los Angeles.

Special Thanks

Education and Community Partnerships receives generous support from Laura & James Rosenwald & Orinocco Foundation, Eva & Marc Stern, the Artists & Educators Forum and Center Theatre Group's Corporate Circle.

Additional support for Education and Community Partnerships is provided by The Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation, the Employees Community Fund of Boeing California, The Sascha Brastoff Foundation, The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Foundation, Brookside Fund, the Brotman Foundation of California, Diana Buckhantz & Vladimir & Araxia Buckhantz Foundation, the Carol and James Collins Foundation, the Culver City Education Foundation, the James A. Doolittle Foundation, the Fineshriber Family Foundation, the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, The Friars Charitable Foundation, the Lawrence P. Frank Foundation, The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation, The Green Foundation, the William Randolph Hearst Education Endowment, HUB International, MetLife Foundation, the Music Center Fund for the Performing Arts, the Kenneth T. & Eileen L. Norris Foundation, the Rosenthal Family Foundation, Sony Pictures Entertainment, the Dwight Stuart Youth Fund and Theatre Communications Group.

Center Theatre Group is a participant in the A-ha! Program: Think It, Do It, funded by the MetLife Foundation and administered by Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for not-for-profit American Theatre.

