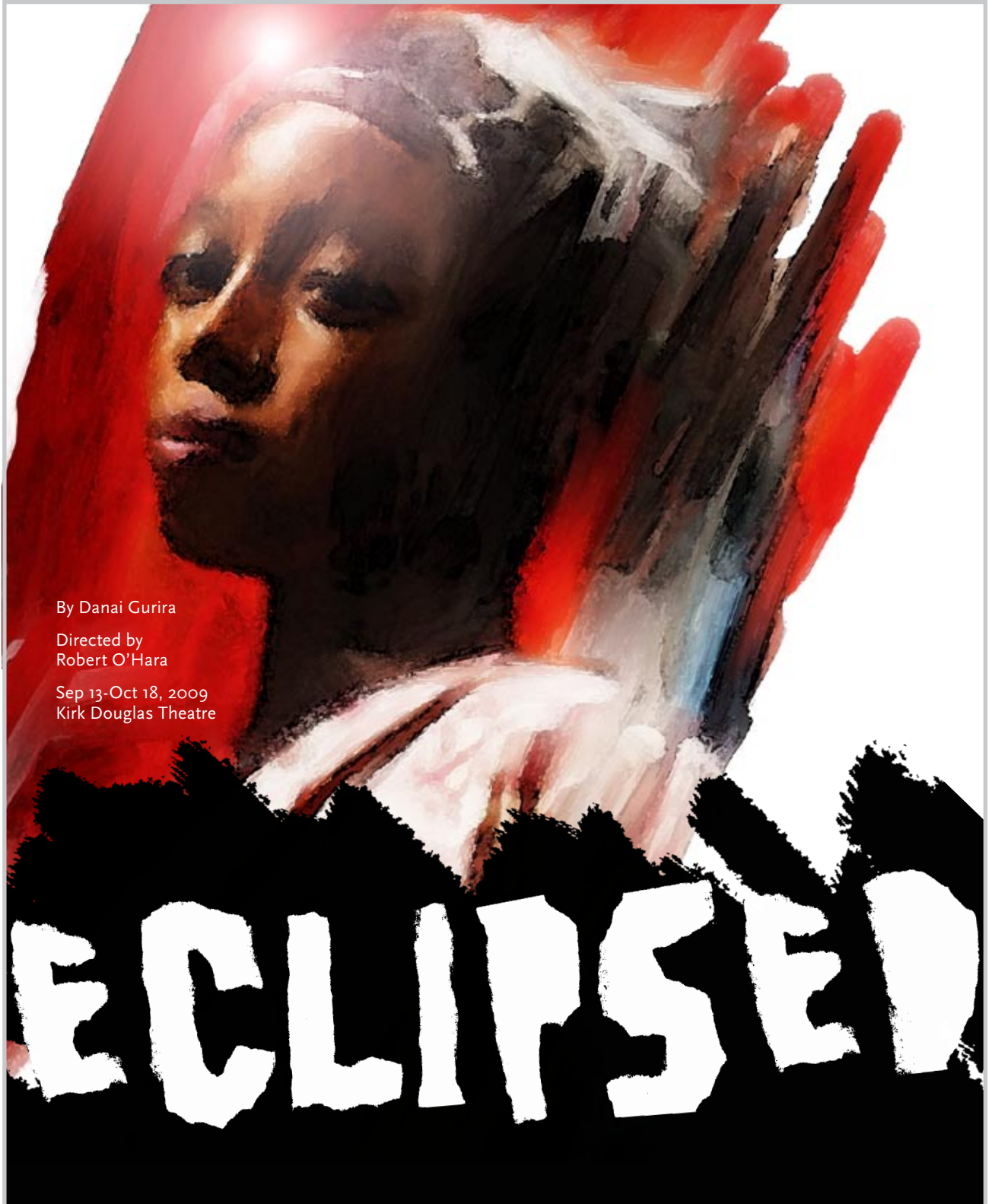




Educator Resources



By Danai Gurira

Directed by
Robert O'Hara

Sep 13-Oct 18, 2009
Kirk Douglas Theatre

ECLIPSED

Welcome

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Center Theatre Group is excited to have you and your students join us at the Kirk Douglas Theater to see *Eclipsed*, a new play by Danai Gurira. 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 both Center Theatre Group's Discovery Guide and Educator Resources raise questions: questions about women's roles and options, questions about war, peace, and survival, questions about theatre. Our goal is to provide you with a variety of entry points into *Eclipsed* so that you can choose what best suits you and your students.

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

We have organized the Educator Resources into the following sections:

Student 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. For *Eclipsed*, this includes information about the founding of Liberia, the Liberian civil war(s), Liberian culture, as well as research about the impact of wartime violence on women. This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the Student Discovery Guide. This section can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.



L.A.'s Theatre Company

Ahmanson Theatre
Mark Taper Forum
Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Connection

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the student's lives and the world we live in. Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion, and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express. Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by *Eclipsed*. The 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 *Eclipsed*!

About *Eclipsed*

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Eclipsed is a new drama exploring five women’s journey discovering their strengths during Liberia’s Civil War. It is a chilling, humanizing and surprisingly funny portrait of transformation and renewal.

The “wives” of a rebel commanding officer form an unlikely community in the hostile battle zone. Their world is transformed by the arrival of two newcomers and the return of a former “wife” turned rebel soldier. Playwright Dania Gurira says “Because for most of history, men have not only fought wars but have also been the ones to write about them, the role of women in war has largely been overlooked. Yet in recent decades, due to the pervasiveness and variety of news media as well as the rise of female journalists, editors and historians, attention has finally been focused on the role of women in times of war.” *Eclipsed* celebrates women and their strength to navigate the most brutal of circumstances.

About the Playwright

DANAI GURIRA (*Playwright*) co-created and performed in the award-winning two-woman play *In the Continuum*, which premiered off-Broadway and toured the U.S. and Southern Africa. *In the Continuum* was presented in the 2006-2007 season at CTG’s Kirk Douglas Theatre. For her work on that production, Danai won a 2006 Obie Award, the 2006 Outer Critics John Gassner Award, the Helen Hayes Award for Best Lead Actress (2007) and the 2004 Global Tolerance’ Award (Friends of the United Nations), in addition to being honored by the Theatre Hall of Fame. Danai was most recently seen in the acclaimed film *The Visitor* (with Oscar-nominated actor Richard Jenkins) and on Broadway in Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*. She is the recipient of ‘08 TCG New Generations travel grant for *Eclipsed* and has taught playwriting and acting in Liberia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. She is presently developing a play about the current situation in Zimbabwe with the Royal Court in London and completing another Zimbabwean piece entitled *The Convert*. *Eclipsed* had its world premiere at the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. this month, and will also be presented at Yale Repertory in October-November of this year. Danai received her MFA in acting from NYU. Danai was born in the U.S. to Zimbabwean parents and raised in Zimbabwe.

Synopsis

SCENE ONE

It's 2003. A dilapidated shelter, which may once have been someone's decent home, now serves as an army camp for the rebel group calling themselves Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, or LURD. Liberia has been engulfed in years of war as rebel groups battle the government army of President Charles Taylor for power. In the darkness, two women hide a young girl under a large metal tub. As the lights rise, we see Helena, a Liberian woman in her mid-twenties, and Bessie, a pregnant Liberian woman in her late teens, trying to conceal the tub. Underneath hides a 15-year-old-girl, referred to only as The Girl, who Bessie and Helena are trying to keep from a man called the C.O., or Commanding Officer. Making sure that the C.O. is nowhere in sight, Bessie and Helena let The Girl out. The Girl is describing to them the plot of the American movie, *Coming to America*, where African-American comedian Eddie Murphy plays an African prince who has journeyed to the US to find his true love. Helena and Bessie think the story that The Girl tells is ridiculous. The Girl asks how long she has to hide. The other women want to keep her hidden from the C.O. for as long as possible. The Girl comes to find out that the women who are helping her would rather not remember how long they have been in this compound. Both women have been captured as wives of the C.O. In this place and time, wives are the property of men.

SCENE TWO

Helena panics upon finding that The Girl is missing. The Girl returns shortly, but we learn that when she made a trip to the latrine in the middle of the night, the C.O. discovered her. The C.O. raped her offstage, making her his wife Number Four, falling in line behind Helena and Bessie, wives Numbers One and Three respectively. The male characters never appear on stage in the play. The Girl does not seem to react to

the rape, and she falls in the pecking order without much resistance.

SCENE THREE

Bessie, Number Three, has her suspicions about this stranger who seems to willingly accept her new status as an object for the C.O.'s pleasure. Bessie hates that she will have to give birth to the C.O.'s offspring. As wife Number One, Helena tells The Girl that even though things may not feel good now, she will get used to it.

SCENE FOUR

A week later. Helena tosses out food that is already scarce, because the C.O. is afraid that someone is poisoning him. Helena enters with items that the LURD soldiers looted from civilians. Bessie is excited to have some new things—including dresses, shoes, scarves, a radio, and a book. Bessie gets a shock when wife Number Two, Maima, suddenly appears. Maima, now calling herself "Disgruntled" has been off fighting alongside the men as a soldier in the LURD rebel army. Maima/Disgruntled has brought rice, once a staple food, now a luxury item during a time when the only thing to eat is what can be found. As the one in charge, Helena rejects the rice and orders Maima to go away. Maima leaves, but not before she gets a chance to pose a few questions to this new wife Number Four, and to warn her that Number One is not the only one who can teach her a few things. When Number Two leaves, Bessie tells The Girl about a previous Number Four who was kicked out after Number Two tortured her. The Girl is warned to stay away from Maima/Disgruntled. When Helena brings in the looted items, the women are supposed to go through them in order of their ranking. The Girl spots a book about President Bill Clinton, an item neither Bessie nor Helena find any use for, as they cannot read. The Girl treasures the book. Helena and Bessie are shocked to discover that

The Girl can read. They urge her to tell them all about the book and to read the story of this Bill Clinton, a white man from America whom they have never heard of. The reading is interrupted when the C.O. calls the girl offstage, where he rapes her again. When The Girl returns, she goes straight for the book, reading silently and intently to herself.

SCENE FIVE

Two evenings later. Bessie listens to a newly looted radio. The poor signal fades in and out. Once again, as if out of the shadows, Maima appears. She has brought a stolen dress for the girl. Maima orders Bessie to give the dress to The Girl rather than keep it for herself. When Maima leaves, Bessie keeps the dress out of spite. Helena and The Girl return from fetching water for cooking. Helena orders The Girl to continue reading the book about the former U.S. PRESIDENT. They do not understand as the girl reads about someone called "Monica Lewinsky." The women seem to have grown fond of Bill Clinton, though the particulars of the U.S. government system confuse them. Thinking of her long gone family, The Girl becomes agitated and stops reading. Helena brings back more looted items. Helena does not want anything, so she passes them along to Bessie. Bessie is not impressed, so she passes them off to The Girl. A packet of hair extensions falls from the pile. Bessie is quick to claim it, but Helena makes her return them to The Girl since Bessie already passed them up. Bessie insists that she needs the hair extensions so that her hair can look nice when she gains weight during her pregnancy. The Girl wants the extensions for herself. Bessie is left empty-handed when Helena braids The Girl's hair with the extensions. The C.O. calls The Girl off yet again. Helena keeps the extensions away from Bessie who has not given them up just yet. As they fall off to sleep, Helena tells Bessie not to cook the cassava in the morning, but to save it for a special guest. The Girl returns from being raped again. The women say nothing as they fall asleep.

SCENE SIX

The next day, Rita, an older, upper-class, well-educated woman from the peace organization known as the Liberian Women's Initiative, approaches Helena as she cleans pots at the river's edge. Rita thanks Helena for cooking for her. Helena wants to know why Rita and the other women come to their camp. On the other side of the stage, we see Maima/Disgruntled talking to The Girl. Maima tries to convince The Girl to use her own inner power. The scene switches between Rita and Helena, and Maima and The Girl. In each scene, Helena and The Girl are being taught skills that they did not think that they could learn. Helena begins learning how to write her name. The Girl begins learning how to fire a rifle. Maima tells The Girl that if she had a gun, men like the C.O. would be afraid of her and would respect her more.

SCENE SEVEN

The following day, Helena is cooking and listening to the radio. The announcer reports that as the fighting intensifies, a group of one hundred women dressed in white have marched to the U.S. embassy in Monrovia, pleading for the U.S. to intervene in the war in Liberia. Bessie thinks that the Peace women are witches since they are brazen enough to talk directly to the warlords. Meanwhile, The Girl paints her nails with polish that Maima has given her. When asked about where she got the nail polish, The Girl refuses to say. Helena immediately suspects that it came from Maima. Helena and The Girl argue, with The Girl repeating things that Maima has told her. The Girl says that she has had enough of the C.O. jumping on her. The scene ends with The Girl leaving to join Maima as a soldier.

SCENE EIGHT

Two days later. Maima teaches The Girl how to use a gun. A shootout with warring factions is happening in the distance. The Girl has some difficulty firing the rifle. Joining Maima on the battlefield has proven to be harder than The Girl thought it would be. The Girl wants to know why they had to capture other girls and allow the men to abuse them. Maima tells her that it is either those girls or The Girl herself, and as a soldier The Girl must learn to hunt and follow orders.

SCENE NINE

One month later. Maima leads Rita to a latrine. Rita uses this opportunity to try to convince the heavily armed Maima to choose peace rather than continue fighting. Maima refuses to hear what Rita has to say. Rita becomes emotional as she tells Maima that she lost her daughter because LURD rebels kidnapped her in the midst of all the senseless fighting. Rita then goes on to tell Maima that God will not be pleased with her as long as she keeps up the violence. Maima responds by telling Rita that God will help her because she is trying to protect herself. Maima gestures with her rifle. Rita leaves, with some hesitation, with Maima following behind.

SCENE TEN

The next day, The Girl recounts to Maima how she helped in a raid on civilians. The Girl seems to be getting better at being a soldier. Maima tells her that in order to protect herself further, The Girl should get a man. Maima promises to help The Girl find a man. This leaves The Girl confused, as Maima had told her previously that all she needed was a gun for protection.

SCENE ELEVEN

Two weeks later. Rita and Helena are listening to a radio from within the compound. They learn that the fighting has escalated closer to Monrovia. Rita does not know how she will get back to town. Helena tells Rita about, who is with Maima. Given the few details

that Helena knows about The Girl's background, Rita grows hopeful that The Girl might be her missing daughter. Rita expresses her impatience with how slowly the peace negotiations seem to be going. Rita reveals to Helena that she does not know how to pray, so Helena leads Rita through a Christian prayer. Just then, the heavily pregnant Bessie enters, begging Rita for food, as they do not have any in the compound. Since Rita has not brought any food, Bessie asks her to finish reading the book about Bill Clinton. Bessie expresses her adoration for Bill Clinton. Rita is attempting to explain that Clinton is no longer President of the U.S. when Bessie's water breaks. Rita and Helena rush Bessie off to the midwife.

SCENE TWELVE

A week later. The Girl attempts to pray. Maima enters, telling The Girl she will get her soldier name that day. The Girl still has a little trouble remembering the required mantra for LURD soldiers. Maima tells her to keep practicing. When Maima asks The Girl why she is fighting, The Girl tells her that she is fighting for her mother and all the mothers in Liberia. For that, Maima names The Girl "Moda's (Mother's) Blessing." The Girl tells Maima she thinks that she is cursed. She goes on to recount how she contributed to a young girl's rape and death, but before she died, the girl cursed her. Unsympathetic, Maima scolds The Girl about getting emotional, as a soldier should never get emotional.

SCENE THIRTEEN

That same evening. Bessie is sweeping the camp with her newborn daughter strapped to her back. The Girl enters with a rifle, startling Bessie. The Girl is waiting for Helena, who Bessie tells her is with the C.O. Bessie tells The Girl that she would kill anyone who tried to harm her child. Rita enters excitedly, also looking for Helena. Upon meeting The Girl who she has heard so much about, Rita is disappointed to find out that The Girl is not her missing daughter. Rita asks The Girl for her name, the name given to her by her parents, but before The Girl can answer, Helena enters and starts packing. When Bessie calls her "Number One", Helena screams out "Helena", even spelling it for them. Bessie thinks that Helena has gone mad. Helena tells them that the C.O. says that the war is over because Charles Taylor has left for Nigeria. The C.O. has given Helena permission to go, but after being treated as his possession for so long, Helena says she does not know where to go or what to do. Helena says that she wants to learn how to read like The Girl. Helena hands the Clinton book to The Girl, causing The Girl to slap Helena and threaten her with the rifle. Rita calms The Girl and tries to comfort her. The Girl drops her rifle and falls to her knees in tears. Bessie's baby cries too. When Rita asks for the baby's name, Bessie tells her that the baby is named Clintine. Rita then tries to rally the women to leave the compound, since the war is

reportedly over. Bessie tells her that she wants to stay with the father of her child. Helena does not think that is a good idea. Maima rushes in to take The Girl with her. Maima has heard that Charles Taylor has left Liberia, but she does not think the war is over. Instead of calling her by her chosen name, "Disgruntled," Rita calls Maima by her original name but this does not deter Maima from wanting to go back to continue fighting. Unable to convince The Girl to leave with her, Maima goes, displeased. Helena tells The Girl that now that they can leave, she can go find her family. The Girl believes that her father and mother are dead. Rita tries once again to get Bessie, Helena, and The Girl to leave with her. Bessie again says that she is going to stay. Bessie and Helena say their good-byes. Rita starts to head out with Helena and The Girl. Just before exiting, The Girl goes back for the book about Bill Clinton. She trips over her rifle, and the final tableau leaves her trying to decide between the book, the rifle, or Bessie playing with her baby. Random gunshots can be heard in the distance as the lights fade.

Comprehension

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

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. For *Eclipsed*, this includes information about the founding of Liberia, the Liberian civil war(s), Liberian culture, as well as research about the impact of wartime violence on women. This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the Student Discovery Guide. This section can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.

Liberia

The Republic of Liberia is a country on the west coast of the continent of Africa. Just a few degrees north of the Equator, Liberia is bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). In land area, Liberia is approximately the size of Virginia (about 43,000 square miles or 111,370 square kilometers). Liberia is home to about 3.3 million people, about 44% of whom are younger than age 15. Most of the population lives in urban areas, particularly in and around the capital city of Monrovia.

THE FOUNDING OF LIBERIA

This section can be found in the Student Discovery Guide

AMERICO-LIBERIANS AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

This section can be found in the Student Discovery Guide

LIBERIA'S CIVIL WARS

A timeline can be found in the Student Discovery Guide.

Liberian Culture

LANGUAGE

English is the official language of Liberia. Although there are 16 indigenous languages in the region, English is used in all forms of the media, business, education, and the government.

EDUCATION & LITERACY

So you can read and write and do all dem book ting?

— Helena

Ya... — the Girl

Where you go to school? Where you find school in Liberia? — Bessie

For the former slave settlers of Liberia, education was a high priority. The Americo-Liberians established elementary schools for their children, which had better resources than the those available to indigenous children. Americo-Liberian children would also be sent abroad to the U.S., Europe, and other African countries in order to complete their education. Later, various missionary groups set up the schools for the indigenous people to attend. In the 1960s, a formal education system was established that would provide for Americo-Liberian and indigenous children alike. By the late 1960s, half of the schools were run by the government, and half by churches and other missionary groups. Decades of civil war disrupted the education system in Liberia. In the play, *The Girl*, who is from an urban area, has her schooling cut short because of the violence.

Liberian law states that all children between the ages of 6 and 16 should be in school, but the country does not have enough schools or teachers for such a large population of children. Over 40 percent of Liberians are under the age of 15. And while the government runs some free schools for elementary through high school-aged students, the cost of books and supplies are prohibitive for most. There is a high drop out rate—only one in four students who start the first grade will go on to finish the sixth grade. Fewer girls attend schools than boys, as a family with few monetary resources is more like to invest them in the boy. Girls usually start school later than boys, and may leave as early as the fourth grade in order to get married. During the civil war, few young people could read and write. Today the number of literate Liberian children has risen only slightly, to about 25 percent. Among adults, 73 percent of men are literate

compared to 42 percent of women. The Girl and Rita represent this select group of women who can read and write.

GENDER ROLES

In Liberia, gender roles differ depending on whether one lives in an urban or rural area. In the urban areas, where most of the citizens are Americo-Liberian, a Westernized approach is taken when it comes to gender roles in relationships. Monogamy and heterosexuality are valued and couples choose each other freely. Like in the U.S., young people from the city meet each other in places like school, the movies, or dance clubs. In the rural areas, indigenous groups tend to view women and children as assets. Marriages are traditionally arranged and girls are often expected to marry at an early age. The custom is for the groom to pay a bride-price of cash, a cow, or other valuable items to the bride's family in order for the marriage to take place. Before the arrival of Christianity, traditional tribal customs allowed for one man to take multiple wives. The more wives one man had, the wealthier he was considered. This offended the Christian settlers who practiced monogamy, where marriage was between one man and one woman.

For work, men are expected to go out of the home, perhaps finding work in factories. Women perform the domestic duties of childrearing, housekeeping, and farming. Women are also the ones who take the crops for sale to market and oversee the household financial transactions.

Understanding the distinction in the females' roles in the urban and rural areas helps to understand why Bessie and Helena, who are probably from rural areas, seem to have a different response to their situation from The Girl, who is from an urban area.

TRIBES

Liberia is home to 16 different ethnic groups, or tribes—Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Gbandi, Grebo, Mano, Vai, Lorma, Kisi, Gola, Krahn, Mende, Mandingo, Dei, and Belleh. These tribes make up 97 percent of the population. While there are many similarities between the groups, there are also important distinctions between each. The three largest groups are the Kpelle, the Bassa, and the Gio. The Bassa lived closer to the coast, and they quickly assimilated to the ways of the Americo-Liberian settlers who brought Christianity and formalized education. Smaller groups include the Grebo from southern Liberia and the coastal Kru, whose men were known to be great fisher- and sea-men. It was the Mandingo who had much to do with developing the languages of inner West Africa, while the Vai created their own alphabet and written language. The Gola and the Dei cultivated farms

for rice and cassava, two staple foods of Liberia. In Liberia today, society is diverse as many people who descended from these tribes have moved about, intermarried, and taken on many customs associated with the U.S. and the West.

RELIGION

Christianity is practiced by 40 percent of Liberians, including Baptist, Roman Catholic, United Methodists, and Assemblies of God denominations. Another 40 percent of Liberians practice indigenous animist religions, subscribing to the belief that spirits are everywhere, in both living and non-living things. The other 20 percent of Liberians are Sunni Muslims. As practiced in Liberia, both Christianity and Islam may incorporate some animist beliefs or elements, as it is also likely for Liberians with animist beliefs to incorporate Christian or Muslim elements.

Wartime Rape and Gender-Based Violence

About 40 percent of the women and girls in Liberia have been victims of some form of sexual violence. When women or girls are specifically targeted for, or disproportionately affected by, violent acts like rape, torture, mutilation, sexual slavery, forced impregnation or murder, it is known as gender-based violence. During times of war, and immediately afterwards, gender-based violence is often accepted, normalized or overlooked, and the perpetrators usually go unpunished. Such acts have devastating effects on the victims themselves, as well as their communities and families. Systematic acts of mass rape during wartime have been reported in many countries, including Bosnia, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Peru, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Uganda. The intent is to humiliate the victims and destroy their culture and community, as men are often forced to watch as their wives or daughters are raped. In Bosnia, for example, Serbian forces carried out a mission of so-called “ethnic cleansing”, in part by raping Muslim women. An estimate of over 200,000 Muslim women were raped—many of whom were impregnated by their attackers, as a tactic to strike fear in the Bosnia Muslims and to diminish the Muslim population by creating half-Serbian children. “Those committing the atrocities were effectively saying ‘we’re going to kill you, or destroy your capacity to breed,’” stated Sarah Maguire, a UK-based lawyer and human rights consultant, speaking to the humanitarian news and analysis service, IRIN¹. The victims are dehumanized, and left with physical and psychological scars that remain with them for the rest of their lives. Survivors also face rejection from their families and communities after suffering such attacks.

[1] Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), "IRIN-In Depth: AFRICA-ASIA: Rape as a tool of war." 27 July 2009. <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=62817>>

Societies where there is an imbalance in gender relations, where women are not traditionally as valued as men, perpetuate the problem, and continue to put women at risk, even during times of peace. As the UNIFEM report states:

Violence against women in wartime is a reflection of violence against women in peacetime, as long as violence against women is pervasive and accepted, stress, small arms proliferation and a culture of violence push violence against women to epidemic proportions, especially when civilians are the main targets of warfare.

In recent years, organized efforts have been made to address the epidemic of violence against women, but much more remains to be done. With *Eclipsed*, Danai Gurira draws the audience's attention to the commonly known, but often unaddressed, issue of violence against women during war.²

[2] "UNIFEM Issue Brief on Violence." United Nations Development Fund for Women. 29 July 2009 <<http://www.womenwarpeace.org>>.

Throughout *Eclipsed*, the playwright intentionally leaves the male characters offstage in order to focus the attention on the women trying to survive in war-torn Liberia. Before the start of the play's action, the principal characters, including Helena, Bessie, Maima, and The Girl, were taken to be "wives" by a Commanding Officer (C.O.) the audience never sees. At different times in the script, the women talk about being "jumped on" and "abused" by the C.O., and it is implied that there are several instances where the C.O. rapes them offstage. Each of the women seems to have a different response to this. Helena, who has been with the C.O. the longest, tells The Girl after the C.O. attacks her for the first time, "It betta den what happen to some of de gals out dere, all de soldier get to have dem. Wit us, it just de C.O. I know it no feel good right now, but it gon get betta – you gon get use it [...]" Some women who have been persistently attacked reach a point where they begin to passively accept their abuse or exploitation. Bessie, who is pregnant for most of the play, is forced to have a child fathered by the C.O. Early in the play Bessie says, "I no want it. I gonna hate it." By the end, she grows to love the child, but she is quick to mention that it is because the child in no way resembles the C.O. Maima takes the biggest stance against the C.O. by becoming a soldier. She says, "I woz a wife like you. Den I wake up." Even though she says this, it is interesting to note that later on in the play, Maima encourages The Girl to get a man to protect her, despite having already told The Girl that all she needed was a rifle in order to be safe. The Girl has to decide for herself how best to cope in this horrifying situation of being held in

captivity. The audience watches The Girl's reaction when she re-enters scenes after being raped by the C.O., and follows her on a journey of self-discovery that ends with profound questions about women's choices.

Names

What is your name, the one your family give you?

— Rita

The ritual of naming is the most important way in which an individual can establish an identity in Liberian culture. Among both the traditional ethnic tribes and the Americo-Liberians, the naming of someone has great spiritual and philosophical importance. Liberians believe that a name determines an individual's behavior and characteristics.

I have a nem of war now and it Disgruntled.

— Maima

During the civil wars, warlords gave the male and female soldiers new names that suggested ferocity and strength, like "Rambo", "Dirty Ways", and "Disgruntled", as a way to take on new identities as soldiers and to destroy their original identities. After taking on a new name, it was thought that an individual would be better psychologically suited to carry about their atrocious missions.

Many women did not fight, but were taken as prisoner by soldiers, and given ranks and numbers that indicated how many women that soldier had taken. This practice harkened back to the indigenous tribal traditions of polygamy, but was adapted to reflect the brutality of war. The more "wives" a man had, the more important he was considered. Women were used merely as commodities, or objects of value. These women were denied names, thereby denying any individual identity.

Connections

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the student's lives and the world we live in.

Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion, and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

Women

Eclipsed deals with women during war, their struggle to survive and the choices they must make. Discuss the five women we meet in *Eclipsed*. Is there a character you most identify with? Why? Is there a character that you cannot identify with? Why?

- Why do you think the playwright made the choice to never show the male characters onstage? What does that choice do to us in the audience? For the young men in the audience, how does that choice impact you?
- What different aspects of being female do these characters represent? What choices do the women have in this world?
- At the end of the play, which choice do you think The Girl is going to make: the book, the baby, or the gun? In your opinion, which choice *should* she make? Why? What would you do in her situation?
- How can Liberia have a history of gender based violence towards women, yet elect a female President? What do you think is going on in a country where these realities exist side-by-side? Compare Liberia's paradox to the United States: women's rights are more successfully protected, both legally and socially, yet we have never elected a female President.

Names

Liberians believe that one's name determines an individual's behavior and characteristics. We first meet the women of *Eclipsed* as numbers rather than by their names.

- What happens when you are stripped of your name? Do you lose your identity? How are your name and identity connected?
- Write about your own name. Where did it come from? What does it mean? What does it mean to you? How well does your name "fit" you? If you were going to rename yourself, what name would you choose and why?

The freed slaves who founded Liberia choose a name for their new country that represented what they wanted to be: *Liber* which means free.

- If you had the power and responsibility to name a new country, what name would you choose and why?

War

I don't know if dey know why dey fightin — Helena

Look at the timeline in the Discovery Guide. Discuss the Liberian Civil War. What do you think is at the root of the war? What are they fighting for?

- The United States is currently at war. How might our experience of war – via television, newspaper and the internet – be different from a civil war like Liberia's where the violence is taking place in one's own country? What do you think we are fighting for?
- The Girl is given the name "Moda's Blessing" because she is fighting so that her mother may be happy and blessed. Who or what would you fight for? Choose a name that represents what and why you would fight.
- Discuss the words Civil War. How can a war be civil?

Peace

We are part of a large network of women peace makers, it is our mission to end dis war. — Rita

We see images of war on the news and in movies. We seldom see images of peace, or if we do, we don't recognize them as such. What does peace look like? What does peace mean to you? Where is a peaceful place in your life?

- Pick a young person in your life, a younger sibling or child. Write a letter to them describing the world you want them to live in. What does it look like, feel like, sound like? How do we treat one another in this world?
- Create a peace collage using images and words.
- Discuss the experience of describing peace. Was it easy or hard? Can we achieve peace if we don't have a clear image of what it looks like?
- Rita describes her fellow peace workers as "Prayer Warriors." What do you imagine when you hear the words Prayer Warrior? Does it seem like a contradiction or is it a powerful image? Create a symbol that represents what you would pray and fight for as a prayer warrior. Write a poem that is your prayer.

Power

Whot your powar for? — Maima

- Discuss the different symbols of Power in *Eclipsed*: the gun, the book, the baby.
- What are power symbols in our world, in your school, for you personally?
- What is your own power? Where does it come from? What is it for? How do you empower yourself?

Bill and Hillary Clinton

At the top of the play *The Girl* goes straight for the sole book in the pile. It is a biography of a man they've never heard of. His name is Bill Clinton. The Girl, who is the only literate person in the camp, starts to read the book to Helena and Bessie, and all three women, thinking Clinton is still the President of the United States, marvel at his story. — Pier Carlo Talenti, Center Theatre Group, Resident Dramaturg and Literary Manager



Discuss with your students what they know about the Clintons, both during his presidency and present day.



Why do you think playwright Danai Gurira wove this element into her play?

Africa

What do you know about Africa? What assumptions do you have about Africa? Write down words, images impressions, feelings. Where did you get these assumptions or knowledge: movies, books, history?

What does Africa produce or create, that helps make our lifestyle in the U. S. possible?



Match the following products with the part of Africa they come from:

Some African products we use in the United States:

Diamonds, Gold, Uranium, Timber, Iron, Chocolate, Rubber, Coffee, Tea, Oil

Parts of Africa where they come from and associated military/political happenings

Liberia: Charles Taylor and several “war lords” funded their military activities using sales of timber and diamonds on the international market

South Africa: Much of the precious metal, including diamonds used in United States wedding rings are from the mines near Kimberly.

Congo and Rwanda: Rubber

Ethiopia: Coffee

Ivory Coast/Cote D’Ivoire: Chocolate grown on slave plantations with children as the predominant labor force

Nigeria and Sudan: Oil

Creativity

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express.

Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by *Eclipsed*. The 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 *Eclipsed* 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). Each group must 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.
- Have traveled or lived in Africa

Quotes from *Eclipsed*: 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?

I...I no know who I is out of war.

You feed dem, you not get eaten. Dat simple.

I don know what GO means!

Whot is your name, the one your family give you?

Liberia and America de same oh! Liberia started by America!

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 *Eclipsed* 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.

Discuss the power and uncertainty of the future for people like the women in *Eclipsed*, enduring the Liberian Civil wars. Discuss the future each character chooses at the end of the play.

Repeat with the themes of Freedom, War and Peace, Choice, Mother, and/or Power. 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 to the women in *Eclipsed*. Are they similar or very different?

Setting

OBJECTIVES

- *Students will reflect on how the setting can influence the activities that occur in a place.*
- *Students will explore Liberia through image and sound.*
- *Students will reflect on the similarities and differences between Liberia and America.*

EXERCISE

Have the students research and find pictures of Liberia. Dividing the class into groups, have each group imagine and create a day in that location through sound. What sounds would you hear in the early morning versus in the afternoon or at night?

Create a sound score for the picture. Next, create a day in that location through a series of tableaux. Put the score and the tableaux together. Share the sound scenes.

Discuss morning, noon and night in America and in Liberia. How do you think the setting impacts or affects daily life for young people in Liberia?

Roles in Life

OBJECTIVES

- *Students will look at the different roles they play in their own lives.*
- *Student will compare their roles and options to those experienced by the characters in *Eclipsed*.*

EXERCISE

Have students draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper. On the right hand side have students list all the “roles” they play in their own lives (e.g., sister, daughter, friend, student, athlete).

On the other side of the paper have students list an adjective for each of their “roles” (e.g. bossy sister, loving daughter, loyal friend).

Have each student share one role they are proud of with the rest of the class.

Discuss what roles you hope to play in the future (e.g. doctor, mother, actor). Compare the choices available to us in this country with the choices available to the women in *Eclipsed*.

Pictures to Life

OBJECTIVES

- *Students will reflect on the story and the person behind the picture by analyzing a photograph.*
- *Students will communicate the character's thoughts, feelings and activities through tableau and writing.*
- *Students will personalize the history of the Liberian Civil War by reflecting on a photograph from that time period.*
- *Students will discuss and then mirror the creative process that prompted Danai Gurira to write *Eclipsed*.*

EXERCISE

Danai Gurira was inspired to write *Eclipsed* by an image of rebel fighter Black Diamond. Refer to the newspaper photo of Black Diamond and her fellow soldiers in the Student Discovery Guide. Have each student select one of the women to focus on.

Think about: What is the story in this picture? What is this person thinking or feeling at this moment? If this person could speak, what would they say? Share student reflections. What play would you be inspired to write from this picture?

Continue with the image of Black Diamond and/or a variety of pictures of people from Liberia past and present. Ask each student to find an image that intrigues them. Have each participant freeze in the image in their picture. If the picture only shows the face, have them imagine the physicality of the body.

One at a time, ask each participant to share something that his or her character is thinking or feeling. Ask the other participants to listen for the beginning of stories in the thoughts and feelings.

Have each participant fill out a character biography including the character's name, habitat (where and when), family, greatest desire, greatest fear, job and most peaceful place. If the person is a historical figure, stress that the profile involves research as well as observation and imagination. If the character is an ordinary person, the writer will use their imagination and observation to answer the questions.

Ask for volunteers to share their profiles as if they are the character.

WRITING ACTIVITIES FROM THE CHARACTER BIOGRAPHY

OBJECTIVES

- *Students will deepen and broaden their understanding of the characters they created in the previous exercise.*

EXERCISE

Write a day in the life of your character before the Liberian Civil War.

Write a day in the life of your character during the Liberian Civil War.

Write a day in the life of your character in Liberia today. Other writing activities could include a letter from the character to his/her mother, a diary entry or a political document that s/he authored.

Share the writing.

Discuss whether or not focusing on one person helps make Liberia and the conflict shown in the play feel more immediate. Why? Why not?

CURRENT NEWSPAPER IMAGES

OBJECTIVES

- *Students will apply character development tools to current event topics.*
- *Students will learn how to discover inspiration for their own work through research.*

Have students find a photograph that intrigues them from a present day newspaper. Repeat the above activities with the current photograph. This activity could extend into writing one-act plays inspired by the image.

Dialect Exploration

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will learn how actors approach creating a particular way of speaking for a character.
- Students will look at dialects used in *Eclipsed* and examine what we learn about the characters by how they express themselves.
- Students will explore how physicality impacts speech.
- Students will explore “code switching” in *Eclipsed* and in their own lives.

Dialect : 1. A sum total of local characteristics of speech; 2. the sum total of an individual’s characteristics of speech; idiolect. (*From Webster’s Dictionary*)

Actors must examine how and why their characters speak and express themselves. They often start with examining the dialect of the character.

Actors look at the script to determine where the play takes place and where the character is from. Sometimes these two places are different. In *Eclipsed*, the script tells us that we are in a LURD rebel army camp in Bomi County, Liberia. When the play starts, we learn that two of the women are wives of the Commanding Officer of the camp. We also learn that the conditions are very poor and the rebels have been fighting to resist the main government leadership of Liberia. We know the rebels are the underdogs and the women even lower in status. We realize they don’t have even basic freedoms. All of this information helps an actor begin to create their character’s way of expressing and talking.

VERBAL EXPLORATION

Read aloud the following excerpt from *Eclipsed* and/or have your students speak the dialogue in the Discovery Guide.

Helena: (briskly preparing the meal) He gettin more and more mad oh. He actin like bigga devil. And he teking juju den he keep saying stupid ting like, “oh, de monkey Charles Taylor, he got to die, I gon get him”. He don know who Charles Taylor is, whot he done or whot he gon do when he gone. Just talking a lot o notin. But I know why he like dis – he scare cos de women comin - dey gon mek him face hissself.

Discuss your initial reactions in hearing and speaking the dialect. While watching *Eclipsed*, how did the dialect contribute to your impressions of the characters?

Notice that the “d” sound is substituted for the “th” sound. Try speaking the lines and notice where the “d” is in place of the “th” sound. Try putting the “th” back and see how different it feels to say those lines. You will notice you are no longer in the same world as the play once you change that simple sound.

There are websites that have samples of different dialects in English. Go to the International Dialect of English Archives and search for an audio sample of people speaking English with their particular accent. They may have spoken Mandingo, Bassa or Loma in their native tribe before learning English, which inflected their speech patterns. The actor can listen to the sample and look at their script to see how to speak their lines with the rhythms, intonations and inflections of their character.

PHYSICAL EXPLORATION OF DIALECT

Posture influences how we sound and how we express ourselves. Actors do more than just mimic the sounds of a dialect, they also explore how these sounds feel in their bodies.

Have the students find a partner or have the whole class stand in a circle.

Ask student change their posture:

- **Slump the shoulders and cave in the chest**
- **Tuck the hips forward, rounding the back a bit**
- **Frown, turning the corners of your mouth downward**

Now speak to your partner or take turns sharing around the circle.

- **Notice how you feel. What is your mood now?**
- **Notice how your mouth feels. Does your tongue and jaw feel different or move differently than usual?**

Discuss how it felt speaking with that physical posture? Did you feel like a different person or character? Or did this feel familiar to you?

Now, change your posture again:

- **Stand tall**
- **Open your chest**
- **Smile, turning the corners of your mouth upward**

Now speak to your partner or take turns sharing around the circle.

- **Notice how you feel. What is your mood now?**
- **Notice how your mouth feels. Does your tongue and jaw feel different or move differently than usual?**

Discuss how it felt speaking with that physical posture? Did you feel like a different person or character? Or did this feel familiar to you?

CODE SWITCHING

Dialect can be an indication of status in social situations. Some call this “Code Switching.” We often will switch codes—or how we express ourselves—depending on who we are talking with and where we are. In *Eclipsed*, Rita works to forge a connection with the women by speaking in their dialect, Liberian English. Helena notices that the officers of the camp treat Rita “good.” We find out that Rita is educated, able to speak grammatically correct English as well as

Liberian English. She represents the character who is most aware of choice in her life. Because Rita has these tools (education, language and an awareness of code switching), she appears to be empowered throughout the play, and is working to offer this power to the other female characters.

Ask the students to divide themselves into groups of four. Have two students act as parents, and the other two play their children.

- **Have each parent and child improvise and establish a conversation. Encourage the participants to use gestures in their conversation. Choose a familiar at-home subject, such as doing homework or chores.**
- **Once that conversation is established, the teacher says “switch”.**
- **Next, have the two young people talk to each other as though they are now at school. (The parents are no longer in their reality.) Once that conversation is established, the teacher says “switch”.**
- **Now the two parents improvise and establish a conversation. Once they have done so, the teacher says “switch”.**

Discuss what happened to the conversations? Did the style of communication stay the same with each person/relationship? Or did it change? Did you change how you said things based on who you were talking to?

Now try the exercise again and experiment with the young person trying to speak like the parent and the parent trying to speak like the young person.

Discuss who had the power in the different conversations and why? Do you use code switching in your own life? When and why?

Resources For Dialect Research

The International Dialects of English Archive website (IDEA)

<http://web.ku.edu/~idea/> is a good place to start because all of the phonetics and voice samples are in English and there are descriptions of the person reading the text. (For example, a male, 30 years old from this part of this country.)

Go to the website address, try clicking on Africa, then click on Liberia or a country in the same region, like Guinea, and the site will take you to a page where you can listen to how the person from this region speaks English. You will hear him speak English with a Mandingo accent.

Radio-Locator

<http://www.radio-locator.com/cgi-bin/nation?ccode=ke&sid=&go.x=11&go.y=2>
Utilize a computer with speakers and listen to different dialects and radio stations anywhere in our nation and around the world. On the home page, list a zip code or a radio station's call letters, or you can choose a country. The menus you encounter will give the choices of news, pop culture stations and more.

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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.

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

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