



P.L.A.Y.

PERFORMING FOR LOS ANGELES YOUTH



"Boot of Adversity" by Jeremy Ruthberg

No Child...

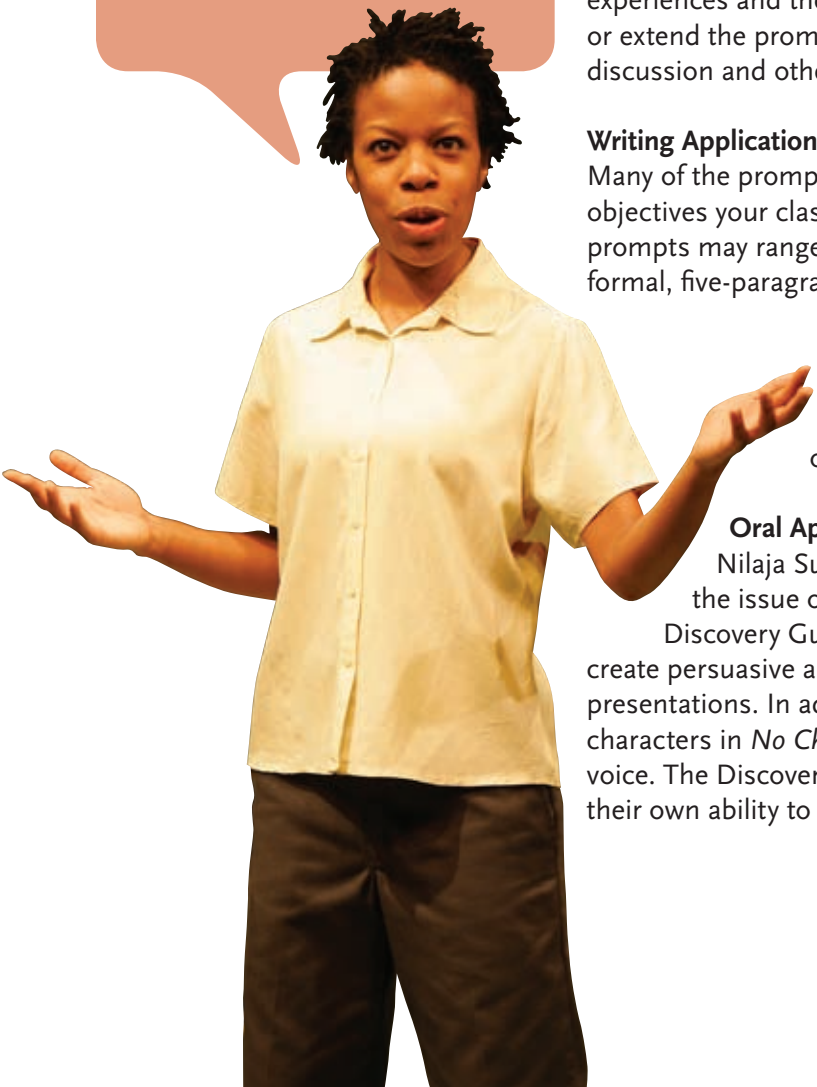
by Nilaja Sun
Directed by Hal Brooks
Kirk Douglas Theatre
March 6–April 13, 2008

TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS

How to Use the Discovery Guide

Mrs. Kennedy, it seems to me that this whole school system, not just here but the whole system is falling apart under us and there are these accountability laws that have nothing to do with solutions and if we expect to stay some sort of grand nation for the next 50 years well we got another thing coming. We're not teaching these kids how to be leaders. We're just getting them ready for jail.

—Ms. Sun in *No Child...*



To the Teacher

The Discovery Guide for *No Child...* has been developed as a prompt-book for a standards-based unit of study appropriate for grades six through eight. The specific learning activities in Theatre Arts can be readily integrated with other content areas, particularly English-Language Arts and History-Social Sciences, to accelerate teaching and learning.

The Discovery Guide is a starting point. Please adapt the material and extend the learning activities to meet the needs of your particular community of learners. Our hope is that the structure and content of this guide will not be merely functional, but inspiring – and that teachers and students will share the thrill of learning through theatre arts.

The Discovery Guide is not designed as an independent workbook. It is a resource for learners to develop skills in storytelling, literary analysis and collaboration that are essential in Theatre Arts, English-Language Arts, History-Social Sciences and other content areas. Oral discussion and writing prompts are designed so that students may relate key ideas to their personal experiences and the world around them. Teachers are encouraged to adapt or extend the prompts. Teachers may choose some prompts for small group discussion and others for the whole group.

Writing Applications

Many of the prompts in the Guide are easily adaptable to match writing objectives your class might already be studying. Written responses to the prompts may range from short expository answers in complete sentences to formal, five-paragraph persuasive essays.

In any case, teachers at all grade levels are encouraged to design at least one rigorous, standards-based written performance assignment in conjunction with their unit on *No Child...*

Oral Applications

Nilaja Sun's *No Child...* creates a persuasive emotional argument on the issue of arts education in public schools. Several exercises in the Discovery Guide are designed to give your students an opportunity to create persuasive arguments of their own, and to share those positions in oral presentations. In addition, Nilaja Sun is a solo performer who portrays sixteen characters in *No Child...* by changing her physicality and the inflection of her voice. The Discovery Guide outlines the essential tools for students to explore their own ability to create multiple characters in a monologue presentation.

Scope and Sequence of the Lessons

In order to provide a comprehensive and sequential unit of study, we suggest that students have the opportunity to explore the whole variety of lessons in the Discovery Guide.

The activities are designed to be completed in sequence. The activities on pages 4 through 10 are to be completed before the students see the production of *No Child...* The discussion and writing prompts on pages 11 through 14 and the Resources on page 15 are intended to stimulate reflection, analysis and further inquiry after students attend the play.

Vocabulary

Introduce the key vocabulary words on each page as they occur. Help students pronounce the words correctly; provide opportunities to use the words in complete sentences.

Nilaja Sun's Advice for Teachers: It's the same advice she receives from older, retired teachers who attend *No Child...* "Pair up with a positive mentor-teacher in your school," says Sun, "because that person will help you through the good times and the bad."



The Goals

Regardless of grade level, the unit is designed to teach **enduring understandings** that students will take with them for life. The themes and questions in the chart can be discussed before and after the students' experience at the performance to guide them toward the enduring understandings.

	THEATRE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	SOCIAL AND LITERARY THEMES
Enduring Understandings	<p>The theatre can be used to shed light on both sides of an argument or to assert the logical, ethical or moral superiority of one perspective.</p> <p>Using voice and gesture, a single actor can portray a multitude of characters within a single performance.</p> <p>Characters of divergent backgrounds speak differently and must be written and performed with their differences in mind.</p>	<p>A well-crafted argument is useful in academic, social and work situations, as well as politics – or even a car purchase.</p> <p>Successfully delivering an oral presentation or performance is exciting and gratifying.</p> <p>Understanding character helps us understand ourselves, other people and historical figures.</p>
Essential Questions	<p>What makes a play effective in influencing your opinions or feelings?</p> <p>Can you create simple gestures to represent some people you know? When you do them, can others guess who they are?</p> <p>Does your bus driver speak differently than your school principal, or a news reporter than your best friend? How?</p>	<p>What elements make up a successful persuasive argument?</p> <p>How do you prepare for an oral presentation or performance?</p> <p>How is your background and identity conveyed by the way you speak? What can you learn about others from the nature and content of their speech?</p>

The Standards

Teachers should “bundle” one of the recommended theatre focus standards with a focus standard from another content area to help design each class’s integrated unit of study.

For instance, you might be able to bundle one of the recommended History-Social Sciences focus standards with a focus standard from theatre and another content area such as Language Arts.

THEATRE

Artistic Perception: Development of the Vocabulary of Theatre

1.1 Students observe theatrical productions and respond to them, using the vocabulary and language of the theatre.

Creative Expression: Creation/Invention in Theatre

2.2 Use effective vocal expression, gesture, facial expression and timing to create character.

Aesthetic Valuing: Derivation of Meaning from Works of Theatre

4.2 Identify examples of how theatre, television and film can influence or be influenced by politics and culture.

Connections, Relationships, Applications: Connections and Applications

5.1 Use theatrical skills to communicate concepts or ideas from other curriculum areas, such as a demonstration in history social science of how persuasion and propaganda are used in advertising.

Careers and Career-Related Skills

5.2 Demonstrate projection, vocal variety, diction, gesture, and confidence in an oral presentation.

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARTS

Writing: Writing Applications

2.4/2.5 Write persuasive compositions:

- a. State a clear position on a proposition or proposal.
- b. Support the position with organized and relevant evidence.
- c. Anticipate and address reader concerns and counterarguments.

Listening and Speaking: Comprehension

- 1.1 Relate the speaker’s verbal communication (e.g., word choice, pitch, feeling, tone) to the nonverbal message (e.g., posture, gesture).
- 1.2 Paraphrase a speaker’s purpose and point of view and ask relevant questions concerning the speaker’s content, delivery and purpose.

Speaking Applications

2.4 Deliver persuasive presentations:

- a. Provide a clear statement of the position.
- b. Include relevant evidence.
- c. Offer a logical sequence of information.
- d. Engage the listener and foster acceptance of the proposition or proposal.

HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCES

Cultural Literacy: Recognize that literature and art shape and reflect the inner life of a people.

Participation Skills: Develop social and political participation skills.

Critical Thinking Skills: Define and clarify problems.

Before the Play

HOW TO USE THIS DISCOVERY GUIDE

NO CHILD.... written and performed by Nilaja Sun, is a fascinating journey into the challenged and charged environment of a New York City high school classroom. In the play, a visiting teaching artist named Nilaja Sun attempts to energize students by staging *Our Country's Good*, a play by Timberlake Wertenbaker. The play itself and the experience of staging the play have a profound impact on sixteen different characters at the school, each one portrayed by Sun. *No Child....* takes a hard look at the challenges faced by students and teachers alike in the contemporary educational system in America. This Discovery Guide will offer some social context for the circumstances and perspectives voiced in the play, as well as examine the use of theatre arts as a medium for persuasive argument.

VOCAB
Vocabulary words are in bold type. Definitions are within each section.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS DISCOVERY GUIDE
Provide a context for the story and ideas in *No Child....* as they relate to the public education system in contemporary America.

Familiarize students with the means to construct effective arguments.

Cross dialogue to express a point of view and convey character.

Page 2

Mrs. Kennedy, it seems to me that this whole school system, not just here but the whole system is falling apart under us and there are these accountability laws that have nothing to do with solutions and if we expect to stay some sort of grand nation for the next 50 years well we got another thing coming. We're not teaching these kids how to be leaders. We're just getting them ready for jail.

—Nilaja Sun in *No Child....*

Explore the use of theatre arts for purposes of persuasion.

Consider the skills required when an actor portrays multiple characters.

NO KIDDING

[BEFORE THE PLAY]

- One Woman Show 4
- Art as Persuasion 6
- Creating Character 9

[AFTER THE PLAY]

- Point of View 11
- Who Are You Talking To? 12
- That Thing You Do 14
- Concluding Remarks 15
- Resources 15
- About P.L.A.Y. 15

DISCOVERY GUIDE CREDITS

Diag Casey, Discovery Guide writer, is a playwright and poet for young people. His youth musical *Nobody's Perfect*, adapted from his novel co-written with actress Marisa Matlin, premiered at the Kennedy Center in October 2012 and will embark on a national tour in 2013. In 2011, he wrote a new youth musical, premiered at South Coast Play in Costa Mesa, CA, in June 2011.

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CenterTheatreGroup.org/education 3

Page 3

Pages 2–3: How to Use this Discovery Guide

Rationale: Students will be able to optimize their learning if they have a clear understanding of the layout of the Discovery Guide and objectives of the exercises contained in the unit.

Exercise: Read and discuss the objectives of the Discovery Guide with the class.

Exercise: Have the students identify the name of the Discovery Guide writer and graphic designer.

Exercise: Read and discuss the quotation on page 3 from Nilaja Sun’s *No Child....* Ask the students if they understand, identify or agree with the statements. Ask why or why not.

Before the Play

VOCAB
 CON: A reason or argument against something.
 JEWELLE DELANEY: A young person who does not obey authority and continues to rebel for freedom or violence.
 PRO: A reason or argument for something.
 STANDARDIZED: Created to be the same whenever you go.
 TEACHING ARTIST: A guest teacher who is also a professional actor, writer, dancer, musician, or visual artist.

CAST OF CHARACTERS:
 In her one-woman performance, Nilaja Sun portrays sixteen different characters.

Jackson Baron Capeford III Janitor and narrator	Nilaja Sun teaching artist	Mrs. Kennedy School principal	Ms. Tam, Ms. Projindra and Ms. Johnson Classroom teachers	Shondrika, Jerome, Coco, Brian, Jose, Chris, Philip and Kenema Students	Security Guard Doris Guzman Jojo's grandmother
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4 P.L.A.Y. Discovery Guide No Child...

Page 4

EXERCISE: WHO CARES?
 NILAJA SUN CLEARLY CARES A LOT ABOUT ARTS EDUCATION. She has worked in the field as a teaching artist. She has strong opinions about the quality of education in America. She created *No Child...*, a play about the impact of arts education in inner-city schools that is touring the nation.

What is an issue that you care about? It could be something personal, like "I should be allowed to stay up as late as I want" or "I deserve a bigger allowance." The issue could be local: "There should be more skate parks in my town." It could relate to your school, or maybe it is a larger concern like animal rights or the environment or the use of steroids in professional sports.

Pick an issue you feel strongly about. Be specific. Not just "such-and-such is good for bad," but "such-and-such should be more like this."

Draw a picture of the issue. Draw the setting in which the issue occurs. Draw the people, animals or things affected by the issue. Draw the pros and cons of the issue. Draw whatever you want. Just draw it.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND
 When was the last time you took a standardized test in school? Did your teachers explain what it had to do with your education? When was the last time you had an art class? Or music? Theater? Dance?

The title *No Child...* refers to the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, a federal law that requires students to take standardized exams on a regular basis to track student performance. In order to improve student scores, many schools have extended lessons in the test subject areas: language arts, reading, math and, starting in 2009, science. To make time for these longer classes, "less important" subjects are often dropped from the schedule. As a result, many students – perhaps even you – are not offered art, drama, dance, music or physical education classes.

Teaching artist Nilaja Sun working with students in the Making Making Making Program. Photo: © Nilaja Sun/Teatro Y Teatro.

CenterTheaterGroup.org/education 5

Page 5

Pages 4–5: One Woman Show

Rationale: Students will be better positioned to appreciate the jokes and the substantial issues raised by *No Child...* if they arrive with prior

knowledge regarding the nature of solo performance – and the plot. It is important that the students be familiar with the concept of one performer playing multiple roles. Students should also be familiar with the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on classrooms and the corresponding emphasis on standardized testing over arts and physical education.

Exercise: Review the synopsis of the play in the Discovery Guide and discuss as they read. Have students identify the main characters and supporting characters. Identify the main character's objectives and conflicts that arise in the plot. Here is a simple way to introduce the play to the students.

- The play tells the story of a teaching artist who visits a challenging inner-city high school classroom with the goal of having them put on a play.
- The play is performed by one actress who plays all the characters, of all different ages, genders and ethnicities.
- The play-within-the-play concerns prisoners at an Australian penal colony whose lives are similarly impacted by participating in the performance of a play.

Exercise: Review the vocabulary with the students. Discuss in particular the meaning of the words "pro" and "con" to gauge students' comprehension of the concept. Also, make sure they know what a teaching artist is.

Exercise: Read the sidebar on No Child Left Behind. Discuss with the class what changes have occurred as

a result in their school. Do they feel they are missing out on anything? Do they think the standardized tests measure what they are learning in school?

Exercise: Who Cares?

In *No Child...*, Nilaja Sun focuses on the issue of arts education in public schools. In order to appreciate the use of theatre arts to make a persuasive argument, students should identify an issue that they are prepared to tackle. Arts education, of course, would be ideal – but it's not necessarily suitable for all classrooms or students. For the purposes of examining the craft of argument, the issue itself can be personal and relatively mundane (like an allowance or a curfew) or more global and substantial in scope (like global warming). Again, the gravity of the issue is not a concern. It should be an issue that the student can understand and argue completely.

To enable the students to "see" their issues more clearly, the first step is to sketch the matter in a drawing on paper. The drawing might include a positive statement of their argument, a negative statement, or both the pros and the cons. For example, if the issue involved permission to attend a party, the drawing could include the act of requesting permission to attend the party, the party itself, and the alternative – staying at home to do homework, watch television, perform chores or sleep. The images derived from this drawing will provide a "starting place" as students are asked to put their position into words.

Before the Play

BEFORE THE PLAY

ART AS PERSUASION

VOCAB
 Counter: To present an opposing point of view.
 Persuade: To convince someone to do something.
 Persuasive: A person who convinces others to do something.
 Persuade: To bring someone to a decision or goal.

REASONS TO LIVE TO LIVE: which might explain why the arts are a popular form of persuasion, educating and encouraging audiences to change political views, issues, philosophies or personal convictions. People watching a political debate usually have a strong opinion and are difficult to convince. An audience at the theatre, on the other hand, expects to be entertained. While they laugh at the comedy or get caught up in the drama, the audience becomes more open to suggestion, and the playwright's message is more likely to take hold.

Some art is only intended to entertain, of course – and that's okay. Other times, which most direct or indirect messages in the context of their work, hoping to assert their opinion on a particular issue. For example, movies like *The Simpsons* and *Happy Feet* raise the issue of environmental awareness, but the message is buried in the jokes and storyline. On the other hand, Pink's song "Dear Mr. President" and the movie *12 Years a Slave* offer direct and deliberate political statements. Similarly, stand-up comics like Dave Chapelle, Chris Rock and Carlin Vance are known for making persuasive general opinions in their work.

Theatre artists can be equally direct. Playwright Bertolt Brecht made bold political statements in his work so that you know exactly what he believed. Playwright George Bernard Shaw preferred to have his characters argue both sides of the coin – so that the audience would continue the discussion, trying to decide which side was right, long after the performance.

EXERCISE: "DID NOT," "DID SO!"

PERSUASION: Persuasion often develops into a shouting match between two kids, yelling "did not!" and "did so!" back and forth. Neither side wins, nothing gets proved and somebody ends up in tears. A successful persuasive argument takes a bit more planning.

In order to make a strong, well-crafted, persuasive argument, you should state your position, supported with strong, justified reasons – and then anticipate and counter any arguments that oppose your position. Playwrights who want to include a persuasive argument in their work will often investigate every aspect of their issue so that their characters can convincingly argue both the pros and the cons.

ARGUMENT STATEMENT: Make a list of the issue you identified in your drawing on page 5 and write one sentence that clearly presents your point of view on the subject.

6 P.L.A.Y. Discovery Guide *No Child...*

Page 6

SUPPORT YOUR POSITION: At the library or on the Internet, find two facts and a statement from an expert on your issue. Add a personal story with an emotional impact.

Fact one:
 Fact two:
 Expert statement:
 Story:

ANTICIPATE COUNTER-ARGUMENTS: How are your opponents going to argue against your position. List three.

Argument one:
 Argument two:
 Argument three:

DEFEND YOUR POSITION: Rebut the three arguments listed above. Why are they wrong, irrelevant or just less right than you?

Rebuttal one:
 Rebuttal two:
 Rebuttal three:

Page 7

BEFORE THE PLAY

Use the argument you have mapped out to write a persuasive essay. Read your essay aloud to a few people who might disagree with you – parents, siblings, friends – and ask if they are swayed by your argument. Does your persuasive essay work?

Page 8

Pages 6–8: Art as Persuasion

Rationale: Students will be better positioned to appreciate the underlying issues and the particular perspective offered by Nilaja Sun in *No Child...* if they arrive with prior knowledge regarding the use of art as persuasion. It is important that the students be familiar with these concepts in order to be able to discuss their response to *No Child...* after attending the performance.

Exercise: Review the article and engage students in a dialogue regarding other examples from television, film or theatre in which the material sought to persuade them to change their minds or to reinforce their opinion regarding a particular issue.

Exercise: Review the vocabulary with the students. Discuss in particular the meaning of word “rebut” to gauge students’ comprehension of the concept.

Exercise: “Did Not.” “Did So!”
 The exercise outlines four steps to develop an argument from a simple position statement to a fully developed argument, asserting positive strengths and anticipating and addressing potential counter-arguments. Use the drawing exercise on page 5 to prompt a simple position statement. e.g. I believe fill-in-the-blank. Depending on what the student has drawn, the picture may also inspire other aspects of the argument.

Students should use the library or Internet to find facts that support their position, as well as an expert statement. For some issues, finding an expert to quote may be a creative challenge. Enlist the class or a small group to brainstorm what sort of expert might provide a helpful statement. Understanding the purpose of the personal story will help students to choose a story that supports their point of view. Ask students to identify the counter-arguments and then to craft a response to each argument.

Exercise: Essay
 Have students shape their answers to the previous exercise into a persuasive essay. Craft the assignment to suit your class’s developmental needs. Use the space provided in the Discovery Guide; add additional pages as needed.

Ask students to read their essays out loud to individuals who are not likely to share their opinion on the subject. Students should gauge the listener’s response to the essay and report back to the class. In order to prompt a clearer response, teachers might generate a list of multiple choice or true-false questions (not unlike a telemarketing quiz) to assist students in gauging the impact of their essay. Use the example at the end of these Teaching Instructions, or make your own.

Have students read their essays to the class and share other responses they have received.

Before the Play

CREATING CHARACTER

SUN PORTRAYS A TOTAL OF SIXTEEN CHARACTERS over the course of *No Child...*, often arguing with each other. The character who wins the argument is the more persuasive one – and if the playwright is convincing enough, the audience may be persuaded too.

The more a writer knows about a character, the more real that character's words and actions seem. She may not tell the reader or audience everything about the character, but her understanding of how he thinks shows through in what she has written for him to do and say. It is common for writers to use people they know when inventing characters. Some writers claim that every character they create is somehow a part of themselves. All the characters in *No Child...* are based on real people whom Sun has met or seen. It is extremely ambitious to make up every like and dislike, every fear and goal, every habit and expression of a character. Basing a character on one or more people you know – or know something about – gives you a springboard.

EXERCISE: SAYS WHO?

LOOK BACK AT THE PERSONAL STORY you included in your persuasive argument. Consider the people involved in that personal story. They could be people you know well or people you hardly know at all. You might even want to exaggerate your story and add a character that comes entirely out of your imagination.

List the people in your personal story below.

1. Start with "yourself," like Nijala Sun does in *No Child...*
2. Identify someone in your story that you know well.
3. Identify someone in your story that you don't know well, or at all.
4. If you want, make up an imaginary character that fits into your story. Decide whether it is a boy, girl, man or woman, give your character an age, and a name.

Center for Learning and Education 9

Page 9

BEFORE THE PLAY

CONSIDER THESE CHARACTERS. Choose two who together could tell all or part of your story. Write those two names at the top of the two columns below. Fill in the blanks to create each character.

Name:		
What I look like:		
Where I'm from:		
My biggest dream is to:		
I plan to make my dream come true by:		
I am really good at:		
My biggest weakness is:		
My greatest fear is:		
You can always depend on me to:		
What people notice about me is:		
I don't want anyone to know that I:		
What I think about the issue:		

© P.L.A.Y. Discovery Guide *No Child...*

Page 10

Pages 9–10: Creating Character

Rationale: The cast of characters in *No Child...* offers a diverse cross-section of contemporary America, representing many ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds and levels of education. The ability to appreciate and to distinguish various character traits will cultivate a student's own sense of empathy, responsibility and community. An examination of character and character traits will also support students' academic response to historical figures, explorers, scientists and contemporary leaders as students learn to understand people and the world around them.

Exercise: Read the quote from the play regarding Ms. Sun's dismay at teaching students a play about a penal colony. Ask students if they understand the statements and the rhetorical questions that Sun is asking herself. Prompt students to attempt to answer those questions. Are there aspects of their lives that make them feel like convicts? Why and why not?

Exercise: Review the brief essay titled "Creating Character." Discuss the reasons why a performer might choose to base a character on people they actually know. Discuss character traits that students have noticed or recognized about people they know. Examine the difference between imitation and interpretation. Students should be discouraged from basing their characters on other individuals in the room, as the potential mockery of the impressions may distract the focus of the exercise and inhibit other

students from feeling "safe" to make creative choices.

Exercise: Says Who?

Ask students to review the personal story in their persuasive essay and consider which characters are required to tell that story. It may be necessary to imagine additional characters to "flesh out" the story. Students can even be encouraged to amplify their story by adding imaginary characters.

After the students have listed possible characters from their personal story in the Discovery Guide, they should settle on only two characters to develop further for the purpose of this exercise. They will later use these two characters to write and perform a scene from their story.

With those two characters in mind, students should complete the questionnaire regarding each character's personality and objectives. Encourage students to be as detailed and specific as possible in their responses; general answers will only lead to general character choices down the road. Use the space provided in the Discovery Guide.

After the Play

POINT OF VIEW

In *NO CHILD...*, Nilaja Sun shares her perspective on arts education. As audience members, we have our own point of view on her performance. How were you affected by the play?

EXERCISE:
What is Nilaja Sun's point of view on arts education?

Is *No Child...* persuasive? What aspects of a well-crafted, persuasive argument are present in *No Child...*? What aspects are missing?

Was the school portrayed in *No Child...* anything like your school? Were the students or teachers like people you know? Were the issues they faced familiar? Describe three things you saw onstage that struck you as "true" or "real."

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

CenterTheatreGroup.org/education 11

By us doing the show, see what I'm saying, we could prove something to the whole school and our moms and her dad see what I'm saying, and Mrs. Kennedy and Mr. Tam that we're the shi...shining stars of the school, see what I'm saying? — *Shan in No Child*

Grasp? SHADY?

[arts theater]

Page 11

Page 11: Point of View

Rationale: Students need an opportunity to reflect on what they have seen and integrate it into their awareness and perspectives. By considering the questions in this section, students also develop the understanding that the audience is an essential part of the cultural experience of theatre and that their opinions are valid and worth sharing.

Exercise: Review the quotation from *No Child...* on page 11. Ask students if they can relate to the perspective of the character who aspires to be one of the “shining stars” of the school. Have the students had performance experiences of their own? How did they feel?

Exercise: Students should complete the writing prompts independently, once you ensure that they understand the questions. After they have answered, discuss their responses as a class.

Note: *No Child...* does not necessarily mine the pros and cons to render a well-reasoned argument on the underlying issues but exists more as an emotional appeal based on a personal experience. Even so, a passionate personal story is a valid component of a persuasive argument and provides an example for the dialogue that students will write in the next section.

After the Play

[enter me out]

Did No Child... change your mind or teach you anything new? Describe something you now see differently or better understood as a result of the play.

Let me tell ya, I don't know nothing about no No Child, Yes Child, Who Child, What Child, I do know there's a hole in the fourth floor ceiling ain't been fixed since '93, all the bathrooms on the third floor, they broke. Now, who's accountable for that? — Jackson Baron Copeford III in *No Child...*

WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO?

DIALOGUE IS A CONVERSATION between two or more characters in a play. The way a character speaks reflects that person's age, education, interests and background. Accents, dialects, vocabulary, slang or particular expressions inform an audience who a character is and where he or she comes from. In addition, the way a character uses language tells a lot about that character's behavior. A character that interrupts a lot, for example, might be upset, over-enthusiastic or inconsiderate. A character that talks too much could be bossy, nervous, stubborn or indelicate. A character that doesn't talk much at all could be shy, secretive, reluctant to speak — or so powerful that words are not necessary.

Ideally, dialogue should sound like real people talking. Some writers eavesdrop on public conversations so they can acquire an "ear" for good dialogue. At the same time, situations in plays are "larger-than-life" and should not necessarily sound like ordinary day-to-day events. For example, the characters in *No Child...* don't waste much time on general introductions like "hello, how are you?" as it might happen in real life. Instead, they dive right into the action, making their claims and openly speaking their minds, which may or may not happen in real life.

EXERCISE: ARE YOU TALKING TO ME?

LOOK BACK AT THE PERSONAL STORY that supports your position on page 7 and the way you wrote that story into your persuasive essay on page 8. Consider the two characters you created on page 10. Write a dialogue between those two characters that resolves all or part of the personal story. Try to include the arguments you raised in your persuasive essay in creative ways.

Your script should look something like this excerpt from *No Child...* only longer:

Jerome: Mom came home early. Told me to run over here fast as I could.
I missed it. I missed it all. And I worked hard to learn my lines.
Sun: Yes, you did Jerome. You worked very hard.
Jerome: So, you gonna be teaching here again next year?
Sun: That's the plan. But, only 10th graders again. Sorry.
Jerome: Oh no worries, I'm definitely gonna get left back for you. Psych...
Letting go, shoot out to all these sheepsies. You gonna be around.
Sun: No, actually I have a commercial shoot early tomorrow morning.

VOCAB

DANGER: The conversation between two or more characters in a play is called dialogue. To identify dialogue in other people's conversations.

12 P.L.A.Y. Discovery Guide *No Child...*

Page 12

[enter me out]

Oh!
- RED -
- BULL -

13 P.L.A.Y. Discovery Guide *No Child...*

Page 13

Pages 12–13: Who Are You Talking To?

Rationale: The fundamental function of language is to communicate. Oral communication typically

happens in dialogue. Students will benefit from an awareness that speech defines people in real life. We make judgments based on the way people speak. In the real world, people secure employment after a job interview. Similarly, election candidates gather support by holding debates and making speeches. The way we speak naturally carries information about our education, beliefs and values. Oral communication is also an essential tool in persuasion. Great historical events and great scientific discoveries are typically accompanied by historic speeches, declarations and adages. In the particular terms of the theatre, playwrights carefully shape dialogue between people to inform the audience about the characters in a story – their personalities, background, goals, agendas and ambitions.

Exercise: Review the quotation spoken by the character of Jackson Baron Copeford III, the janitor in *No Child...* Ask your students if they remember the janitor and whether they can recall the voice and the physicality that Nilaja Sun created for him. Is there anything about the way he is written that suggests who this character is?

Exercise: Read the brief essay and review the vocabulary with the students. Discuss in particular the meaning of the words “dialogue” and “eavesdrop” to gauge students’ comprehension of the concepts. Encourage students to appreciate the distinction between a discreet, non-judgmental eavesdropping for the sake of appreciating language and

an inappropriate, impolite invasion of privacy. In order to cultivate an awareness of “dialogue,” teachers might prompt students to offer examples of distinctive speech from characters in literature assignments, cafeteria chatter or their favorite television programs. Do characters on one television show speak differently from characters on another television show? Ask students to consider whether their own speech changes depending on their listener. (e.g. How do you speak to your grandparents? How do you speak to your friends?)

Exercise: Are You Talking to Me?

For the dialogue writing assignment, students will use the two characters they created before the play (page 10) and the personal story included in the persuasive essay on page 7. Consider the sample selection of dialogue from *No Child...* on page 12. Ask students to write their personal story or an episode from it in the form of a dialogue between two individuals. Unlike the persuasive essay, the dialogue may not be a complete and well-reasoned argument. It is far more likely to be an emotional appeal, but this will depend on the student’s story. The dialogue can be simple and straightforward but students should be encouraged to make character choices so that each person’s voice sounds distinct. Students should also be encouraged to make the story “happen” in the dialogue – and not merely have the characters relate the past-tense anecdote of what occurred. Use the space provided in the Discovery Guide and more paper as needed.

After the Play

[AFTER THE PLAY]

EXERCISE: THAT THING YOU DO

CHOOSE A CHARACTER FROM *NO CHILD...* and describe the gesture and voice that Sun uses to portray him or her. What does this suggest about that character's physicality and personality?

VOCAB

Gesture: A movement or body position that expresses an idea, emotion or opinion **Behaviors:** To practice a presenting performance or ritual

Alright, I'm Ms. Sun and I will be with you all for the next 6 weeks and by the end of those glorious weeks, you will have read a play, analyzed the play, been cast in it, rehearsed it and lastly performed it. It's gonna be a whirlwind spectacle that I want you to start inviting your parents and friends and loved ones to come see. — Ms. Sun in *No Child...*

EXERCISE: MIRROR, MIRROR

Nilaja Sun's first step in building a new character is to stand in front of a mirror. "The physically come first," Sun explains. She sometimes models characters after people she actually knows, but "what I do is more of an interpretation than an imitation... it's only an impression of people I know... 'cause I'm not making fun of anyone."

CHOOSE ONE OF THE CHARACTERS YOU CREATED and outlined on page 10. Stand in front of a mirror and find one particular gesture that suggests that person. It might be something you have observed that person do or that suggests a quality that person has. Simplify the gesture so that it is clean and uncomplicated – and repeat it several times.

Nilaja Sun's voice and mannerisms adjust to suit each of the characters she creates, but she doesn't make her characters sound particularly boy-like or girl-like. "Everyone has a different energy," she explains, "I try not to think of it as masculine or feminine energy because that gets into stereotypes that keep the character from being 'human.'"

NOW GIVE THAT CHARACTER A VOICE. Can you duplicate the voice of the person your character is based on? Start with your own voice and consider whether this character's voice is higher or lower, faster or slower, and louder or softer? Come up with a gesture and a voice for the other character you created on page 10. Make sure your characters have different voices and distinct gestures.

EXERCISE: REHEARSE THE DIALOGUE YOU WROTE ON PAGE 13, using the gesture and the voice that you have assigned to each character. Perform the scene for the same people who listened to you read your persuasive essay. Afterward, ask them if this method is more or less persuasive than when you read your essay and be sure to ask why.

14 P.L.A.Y. Discovery Guide *No Child...*



Page 14

Page 14: That Thing You Do

Rationale: In modeling Sun's approach, students will be called upon to tap their own creativity, observation skills and life experience as well as to exhibit empathy, mutual respect, compassion and an appreciation for the context of stereotypes. The experience of creating and portraying two different characters – and staging their own scene, based on their own dialogue – provides an opportunity for students to develop their oral presentation skills and to build confidence in front of their peers.

Exercise: Review the quotation spoken by Nilaja Sun's character in *No Child...* and ask students if they comprehend the substance of the statement and appreciate it in the context of Sun's play. Have they had a similar experience?

Exercise: That Thing You Do
Review the instructions. Teachers can refer to the cast list on page 4 to prompt students with other character names. Give students a few minutes to write their answers before asking for volunteers to share their responses – maybe even demonstrate. Discuss what these vocal and physical characteristics tell us about the people Sun is portraying. Does everyone have similar interpretations?

Exercise: Review the vocabulary with the students. Discuss in particular the meaning of word "rehearse" to gauge students' comprehension of the concept.

Exercise: Mirror, Mirror

Review the brief essay and ask students if they comprehend the instructions. Emphasize that Nilaja Sun's approach is a blend of her imagination and keen observations of real people. She also speaks of avoiding stereotypes that diminish and distort the truth of human character. Encourage students to work alone on their creative choices for their characters before sharing them with anyone else. Reinforce the distinctions between impersonation and impression – and remind students of Nilaja Sun's warnings about the use of stereotypes. Once students have identified a voice and a gesture for their characters, they should rehearse them repeatedly so that it becomes relatively fluid and effortless.

Exercise: Ask students to apply the characters they have created with voice and gesture to the dialogue they wrote on page 13. Share the performances with the class. Students might also share their performance with the same audience that listened to their persuasive essay earlier – and then repeat the questionnaire to gauge whether this version of their persuasive statement was more or less convincing than their essay. Encourage students to share the results with the class.

After the Play

CONCLUDING REMARKS

WE HOPE THIS GUIDE HAS ENHANCED your experience of *No Child...* by offering context on contemporary issues in public education and by sharing methods of using the arts as a persuasive form to assess your opinion. Despite being challenged as a worthwhile area of study in the public school curriculum, the arts remain important to our culture for many reasons, including the ability to explore a variety of perspectives on world issues.

RESOURCES

BOOKS

Up The Down Staircase
by Bel Kaufman (Harper Perennial, 1991)
Novel about teachers overcoming obstacles to reach their students

WEBSITES

www.nochildleftbehind.gov
Everything the government ever wanted you to know about No Child Left Behind

www.itsamericacalls.org/Info_Episode.aspx?episode=21
This American Life: story of the inmates of a maximum security prison performing Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act V, with the support of a teaching artist

www.broadway.com/go/press/Story.aspx?story=13
Interview with theatre artist Nilaja Sun

FILM

The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe
directed by John Bailey (Showtime Networks, 2007)
Lily Tomlin in multiple roles

Stand and Deliver
directed by Ramon Menendez (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1982)
Edward James Olmos as Jaime Escalante, a real-life teacher who brings calculus to inner-city kids

Freedom Writers
directed by Richard LaGravenese (Paramount, 2007)
Hilary Swank as Erin Gruwell, a real-life teacher who brings literature to inner-city kids

Music of the Heart
directed by Win Green (Miramax, 1999)
Mary McCormack as Roberta Granger, a real-life teacher who brings music to inner-city kids

P.L.A.Y.

For 37 years, Center Theatre Group's P.L.A.Y. (Performing for Los Angeles Youth) has served 25,000 – 30,000 young people, teachers and families annually through a variety of performances, residences, discount ticket programs and innovative educational experiences. P.L.A.Y. offers programs that allow young people, teachers and families to attend productions at the Mark Taper Forum, Auditorium and Ark Douglas Theatre for free or no cost. P.L.A.Y. is dedicated to artistic excellence and innovation in its theatrical productions and to the development of young people's skills and creativity through the exploration of theater, its literature, art and imagination.

PERFORMING FOR LOS ANGELES YOUTH

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Page 15

Page 15: Concluding Remarks, Resources and About P.L.A.Y.

Rationale: Students can be motivated to use skills and knowledge gained from *No Child...* to extend their learning in other curricular areas.

Exercise: Beyond the Performance

- Read the passage: “We hope this guide has enhanced ...” aloud to the class.
- Encourage students to list moments of perceived areas of improvement in their own classroom. Post the list on the board.
- Encourage students to list examples of when arts education made a positive impact on their public school experience. Post that list on the board.

Exercise: After the students have seen the play, have them write a letter using one or more of the following elements of writing: narrative, descriptive, expository, response to literature or persuasive. Mail their responses to:

P.L.A.Y.
601 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Survey

Student Name: _____

Listener Name: _____

After listening to the student's essay, please answer the following questions.

1. Please state the point of view expressed in the essay.

2. Did you agree with this point of view before hearing the essay?

Yes No

3. After hearing the essay are you more or less likely to agree?

- Far more likely to agree
- Somewhat more likely to agree
- About the same
- Somewhat less likely to agree
- Far less likely to agree

4. Did you learn anything new from the essay?

Yes No

Please explain:

5. What part of the argument was most persuasive or memorable? Please explain: