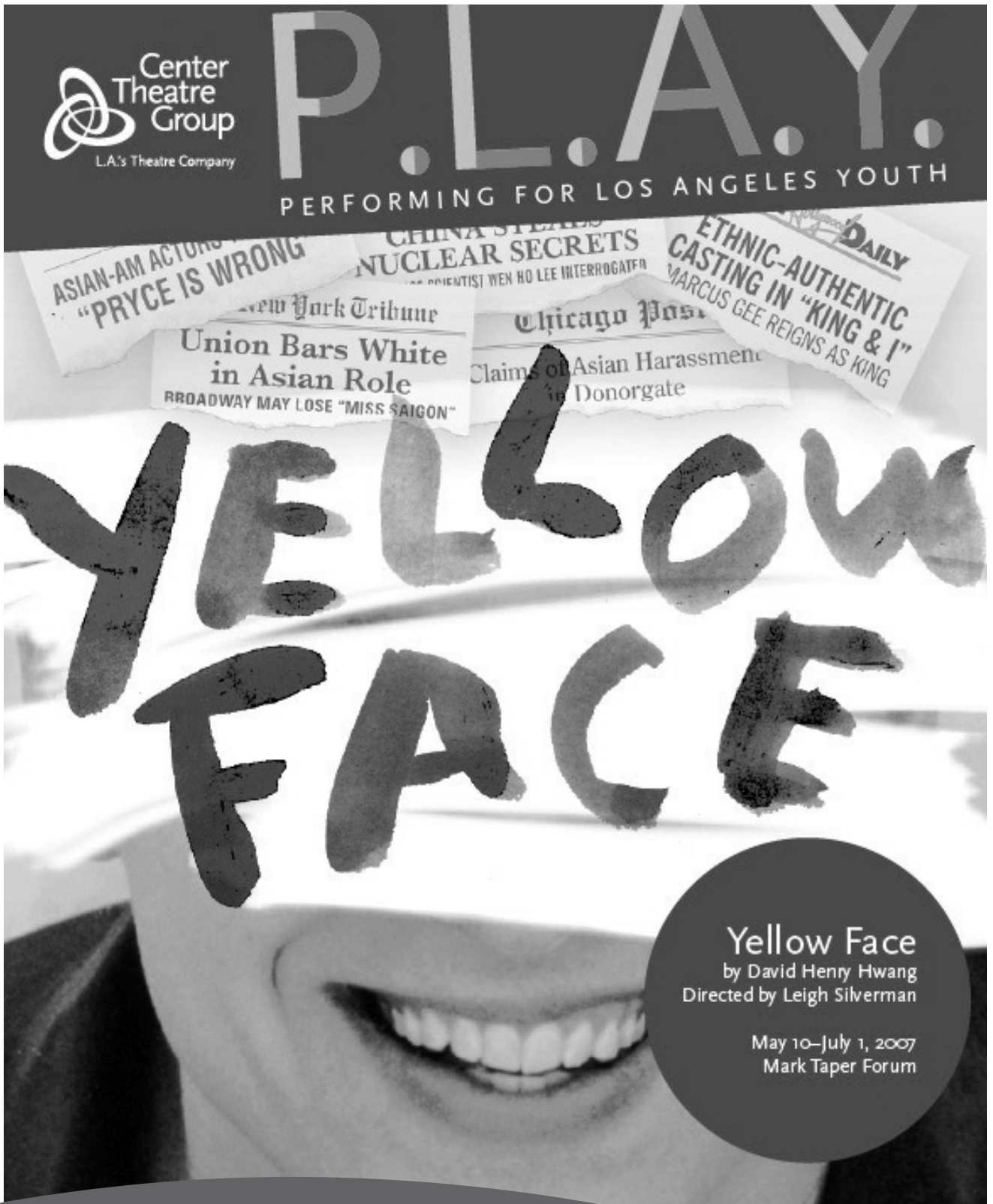


TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS



Center Theatre Group  
L.A.'s Theatre Company

P.L.A.Y.  
PERFORMING FOR LOS ANGELES YOUTH

ASIAN-AM ACTORS  
"PRYCE IS WRONG"

CHINA STEALS  
NUCLEAR SECRETS  
ORIENTALIST WEN HO LEE INTERROGATED

DAILY  
ETHNIC-AUTHENTIC  
CASTING IN "KING & I"  
MARCUS GEE REIGNS AS KING

Union Bars White  
in Asian Role  
BROADWAY MAY LOSE "MISS SAIGON"

Chicago Post  
Claims of Asian Harassment  
in Donorgate

YELLOW  
FACE

Yellow Face  
by David Henry Hwang  
Directed by Leigh Silverman

May 10–July 1, 2007  
Mark Taper Forum

Center Theatre Group  
L.A.'s Theatre Company

P.L.A.Y.  
Performing for Los Angeles Youth

# How to Use the Discovery Guide

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## TO THE TEACHER

This Discovery Guide for *Yellow Face* has been developed as a prompt-book for a standards-based unit of study appropriate for grades nine through twelve. The specific learning activities in theatre arts can be readily integrated with other content areas, particularly 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 the Guide will not be merely functional, but also inspiring—and that teachers and students will share the thrill of learning through theatre arts.

## How to Use the Discovery Guide

**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, 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 expected 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 *Yellow Face*.

## Message Board –

**[PLAY.CenterTheatreGroup.org/forums](http://PLAY.CenterTheatreGroup.org/forums)**

With *Yellow Face*, P.L.A.Y. is testing a new message board tool. Students may respond to the play and its themes in three topic areas: Racial Identity; Fact & Fiction: “reality” programming and the mockumentary; and General Responses to the play & theatre-going experience. This is an opportunity for students to share their thoughts and experiences with others from all over the Los Angeles area. Please encourage your students to participate if you think they will benefit.

Students will be required to supply the following information: user name, password, name, teacher, class, school, email address. No personal information will be viewable by other users. We will monitor the site for inappropriate comments. We will contact you if your students are using the site improperly.

## 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 8 are to be completed before the students see the production of *Yellow Face*. The discussion and writing prompts on pages 9 through 12 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.

## THE GOALS

Regardless of grade level, the unit is designed to teach **enduring understandings** that students will take with them for life. One set of these understandings is about David Henry Hwang’s unique approach to documentary drama in *Yellow Face*. The other is drawn from compelling social issues and themes raised by Hwang in his play, as interpreted by director Leigh Silverman. Charted below are some **essential questions** that can be raised before, during 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 playwright’s voice emerges from many characters in a single script.</p> <p>Political satire uses humor to undermine authority and permit an audience to laugh about sensitive and controversial issues.</p> <p>Documentary drama references real-life events in a scripted performance.</p>   | <p>Complicated issues of assimilation have long plagued Asian-Americans in their efforts to find mainstream acceptance in this country.</p> <p>All racial and ethnic groups in America have experienced racial prejudices at one time or another.</p> <p>Race and ethnicity can be a sensitive subject in America that requires one to listen and respect other people’s varying views and perspectives.</p>   |
| Essential Questions     | <p>What does it mean to perform in “yellow face”?</p> <p>How does the hard look at himself that David Henry Hwang takes in <i>Yellow Face</i> inspire or encourage the audience to take a similar look at their own attitudes and perspectives?</p> <p>How has the distinction between fact and fiction been blurred in television, the internet and other contemporary media?</p> | <p>Why is it difficult to question a person about his or her race in an employment situation?</p> <p>How does the way an individual defines his or her race or ethnicity impact the way s/he responds to the world – or the way the world responds to him or her?</p> <p>How does the experience of Asian-Americans in contemporary America mirror the experience of your own racial or ethnic community?</p> <p>Based on your personal experiences, do you believe that people treat those from other cultures the same way or differently?</p> |

## THE STANDARDS

Teachers should “bundle” one of the recommended theatre focus standards with a focus standard from another content area to help design their classes’ integrated units 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 to help design the classes’ integrated units of study.

### 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.

*Comprehension and Analysis of the Elements of Theatre*

1.2 Identify and analyze recurring themes and patterns (ex. loyalty, bravery, revenge, redemption) in a script to make production choices in direction or design.

#### Creative Expression:

*Development of Theatrical Skills*

2.1 Create short dramatizations in selected styles of theatre, such as melodrama, vaudeville, and musical theatre.

#### Historical & Cultural Context:

*Role and Cultural Significance of Theatre*

3.1 Create scripts that reflect particular historical periods or cultures.

3.1 Describe the ways in which American history and culture is reflected in theatre.

#### Aesthetic Valuing:

*Critical Assessment of Theatre*

4.1 Students develop and use criteria for judging and evaluating productions.

#### Connections, Relationships, Applications:

*Connections and Applications*

5.1 Students apply what they learn in theatre, film/video, and electronic media across subject areas.

*Careers and Career-Related Skills*

5.2 Students learn about careers in and related to theatre.

### ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARTS

#### Literary Response and Analysis:

*Narrative Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text*

3.2 Analyze the way in which the theme or meaning of a selection represents a view or comment on life, using textual evidence to support the claim.

3.3 Analyze the ways in which irony, tone, mood, the author’s style, and the “sound” of language achieve specific rhetorical or aesthetic purposes or both.

3.8 Interpret and evaluate the impact of ambiguities, subtleties, contradictions, ironies, and incongruities in a text.

3.9 Explain how voice, persona, and the choice of a narrator affect characterization and the tone, plot, and credibility of a text.

3.10 Identify and describe the function of dialogue, scene designs, soliloquies, asides, and character foils in dramatic literature.

#### Writing Applications

2.1 Write fictional, autobiographical, or biographical narratives:

a. Relate a sequence of events and communicate the significance of the events to the audience.

b. Locate scenes and incidents in specific places.

c. Describe with concrete sensory details the sights, sounds, and smells of a scene and the specific actions, movements, gestures, and feelings of the characters; use interior monologue to depict the characters’ feelings.

d. Pace the presentation of actions to accommodate changes in time and mood.

e. Make effective use of descriptions of appearance, images, shifting perspectives, and sensory details.

### HISTORY/SOCIAL SCIENCE

#### Historical and Social Sciences

##### Analysis Skills:

*Historical Interpretation*—Students show the connections, causal and otherwise, between particular historical events and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.

*Historical Literacy*—Develop research skills and a sense of historical empathy.

*Cultural Literacy*—Take pride in their own cultural heritages and develop a multicultural perspective that respects the dignity and worth of all people.

*Sociopolitical Literacy*—Understand the close relationship between society and the law.

*National Identity*—Recognize that American society is and always has been pluralistic and multicultural, a single nation composed of individuals whose heritages encompass many different national and cultural backgrounds. Recognize the status of minorities and women in different times in American history.

Understand the unique experiences of immigrants from Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Latin America.

*Participation Skills*—Develop group interaction skills.

# BEFORE THE PLAY



Page 2

## 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. This will help them describe their learning process.

**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 quotations on page two by W.E.B. DuBois and David Henry Hwang. Ask the students if they understand, identify or agree with the statements. Ask why or why not.

**Exercise:** Note the years assigned to the quotations. W.E.B. DuBois was writing in 1903; David Henry Hwang is a contemporary writer. Ask the students if race relations are as problematic today as they were 100 years ago. Ask the students if they anticipate that race relations will be problematic 100 years from now.

HOW TO USE THIS DISCOVERY GUIDE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS: Page 3

# BEFORE THE PLAY

BEFORE THE PLAY

## Where Are You Really From?

**EVERYONE IN AMERICA** is aware of race. Race informs our families and communities; where we live, how we live, who we live with and even what we eat. Race sets our educational goals, shapes our career paths and marks our ambitions. It influences everything from the privileges we take for granted, to the treatment we receive from police officers, to the roads trails we huff at other drivers in a traffic jam.

Since race is experienced at a personal level, each individual approaches the subject with unmet needs and wishes. We hold beliefs about race with such certainty that they might as well be written on our bones. Because it is difficult to challenge and release these convictions, it is important to respect and honor such closely-held beliefs, especially as we attempt to gain new insights into the impact of racism in our world.

As an interactive trial people, we need to bond together in groups that feel safe and supportive. Research makes us belong to one particular group or another. One might look at genetic origins and track bloodlines back to African, Arab, Asian, East Indian, Scandinavian, Hispanic, Native American or British roots, among the many races identified by geneticists in their study of the human species. One might identify with a father's racial identity over a mother's, or vice versa. Our choice can depend on many things, but the factors that weigh into the decision depend on a number of priorities. Some people identify more strongly with a faith community or an ethnic group; others do so lines around gender or sexual orientation.

Race shapes beliefs that at the most of all these issues is power. We choose to belong to groups that empower us; they make us feel safe and powerful. We view other groups with prejudice or bias that reinforce our own group. In addition, an individual choice of racial or ethnic identity is largely determined by visibility. One might choose a group because it highlights his or her visibility in the world; conversely, one might choose a group because it allows a person to vanish within the pack, to be absorbed into a community and essentially to become invisible. Arguably, a group identity might allow an individual to be both visible and invisible at the same time.

## Vocabulary

**Bias:** A preconceived opinion or feeling formed without knowledge, either favorable or unfavorable.

**Essentialist:** Firmly and securely established.

**Genetics:** An expert or specialist in the study of the transmission of characteristics or traits from parents to offspring through the genes.

## Exercise

Your teacher will show you some pictures. Identify which individual is the police officer, the teacher, the astronaut, the banker, the artist and the sales clerk.

Police officer:  
Teacher:  
Astronaut:  
Banker:  
Artist:  
Sales clerk:

Yellow Face

WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM: Page 4

## Page 4: Where Are You Really From?

**Rationale:** Apart from Native Americans, everyone in America is derived from an immigrant population. Young audience members and their grown-up counterparts alike can relate to racial dynamics encountered in *Yellow Face* because “everybody in America experiences race.” The play raises substantial questions regarding racial identity and student playgoers will be better prepared to address those issues if they have already reflected on their own experience of race in their communities. The “racial profiling” exercise/assignment provides an opportunity to accomplish the following three tasks in one exercise. 1) Students will gain practical experience in the imposition of racial profiling. 2) Students will have to articulate the reasons behind their choices. 3) Students will gain insight into their own racial perspectives.

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

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

**Exercise:** Race is a volatile, hot-button subject in America. Teachers must create a safe space in which openness and understanding are valued so that each student is comfortable honestly expressing opinions. In this manner, students will engage in meaningful dialogue without fear of repercussions, inside or outside the

classroom. This dialogue should be prefaced by honoring the fact that students share a democratic society in which free speech, individual rights and cultural diversity are valued. Ask each student to identify an incident when he or she: 1) valued personal freedom of speech; 2) was grateful for individual rights, liberties or representational government; and 3) appreciated ancestors, heritage or cultural diversity.

**Exercise:** Post the six images of people at the front of the classroom. Give your students two to three minutes to decide the occupation of the individuals. Encourage them to apply “snap judgments.” In his book *Blink*, author Matthew Gladwell argues that first impressions arrive sturdily reinforced by years of pre-conditioned responses. There are, of course, no right answers. Reviewing the students’ reasoning should lead to a lively class discussion. Encourage your students to compare and contrast their selections with two specific objectives: 1) to simply air the pre-conditioned stereotypes that guided their “snap judgments”; and 2) to isolate the specific factors that weighed into their decisions (e.g. race, gender, body-type, clothing, appearance, environment).

**Optional Exercise:** Set aside time for students to justify their responses to the racial stereotyping exercise in brief paragraphs. Each response should constitute a well-reasoned and persuasive justification, written in at least five complete sentences.

# BEFORE THE PLAY

**Yellow Face Synopsis**

**IN HIS COMEDY** *Yellow Face*, Tony Award-winning playwright David Henry Hwang revisits his own life story and playfully mixes fact with fiction to offer a satirical examination of racial identity in America. In 1993, Hwang leads a group of Asian-Americans to protest the “yellow face” casting of a white British actor as a Eurasian character in the musical *Miss Saigon*, headed for Broadway.

Two years later, Hwang uses the *Miss Saigon* casting controversy as the basis for a Broadway-bound farce about race called *Face Value*. Hwang’s scathing cast, Marcus Daffman, a non-Asian actor, as the Asian leading man. As the star struggles in out-of-town tryouts amid bad reviews, Hwang learns that his lead actor is actually white. The playwright finds himself the architect of a charade to make the actor appear Asian to the public, even suggesting “Marcus Cao” as an Asian-sounding stage name. Ultimately, the actor is replaced before the Broadway run, but the show flops anyway and Hwang returns to Los Angeles to work as a television writer. He also swallows his pride and accepts his father’s offer to serve on the board of trustees for his father’s bank.

In the meantime, much to Hwang’s chagrin, Marcus Cao is increasingly successful in posing as “Marcus” as an Asian actor. When Hwang confronts Cao on the misrepresentation, Cao counters that he has responsibly embraced the function of an Asian-American role model. He claims that he feels unwelcome and fulfilled as an Asian actor that he ever did before.

To Hwang’s increasing frustration, he and Cao repeatedly cross paths professionally — most notably when Cao is questioned in an investigation of Asian American donations to presidential campaign funds and Hwang is implicated in an overseas money-laundering scandal related to his father’s bank. These events, coupled with the trial of Wen Ho Lee, an Asian American scientist wrongfully accused of espionage, generate tremendous media attention, casting a suspicious eye on the Asian-American community from an arguably racist perspective.

When Hwang himself is approached by a newspaper reporter wanting to “cover the story” on the scandals, the playwright realizes he has the essential elements for a new play — one in which his personal struggle might address greater issues of race in America.

**The Legal Side of Race**  
 What’s the big deal? Why can’t David ask Marcus during his audition if he is Asian? Why can’t an employer ask a person about race?  
 Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, every individual in America is protected against employment discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex and religion. The law means that no one can be denied employment based on race or perceived race, including race-related characteristics like hair texture or facial features or marriage to or simple association with someone of a particular race. The bottom line is that race doesn’t weigh into the decision to hire someone.

In the theater, this restriction poses a thorny problem: if a role calls for a particular race, the casting director may ask the actor about his ancestry or if he speaks a particular language. *Clue* can also be found on the actor’s resume.

**Where are you really from?** is a question I really hate answering. More than anything else that I write or, everyone with an Asian face who lives in America is subjected by the perpetual “foreigner syndrome.” You are “foreign” and even if you’re returned to Asia and rejected from America.  
 —Wen Ho Lee, *1996*

**Vocabulary**  
**Affinity:** A feeling of closeness, liking or belonging with a person, group or idea.  
**Based on:** based on an opinion or selected body that supervises an organization.  
**Discrimination:** Treatment of a person based on the group to which that person belongs rather than on individual merit.  
**Eurocentric:** Of mixed European and Asian descent.  
**Money-laundering:** Concealing the source of illegally obtained money.  
**Repeal:** The act of repealing oneself to be accepted as a member of a group by denying one’s own ancestry or background.

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SYNOPSIS OF *YELLOW FACE*: Page 5

**BEFORE THE PLAY**

**Exercise: Stereotype Yourself**

With what group do you feel the closest affinity? Identify your own association based on race or ethnicity. I identify myself as \_\_\_\_\_.

With that identity in mind, rank your responses to the following three questions based on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (greatest).

- How important is this racial or ethnic identity to you?
- How obvious is this racial or ethnic identity to someone who does not know you?
- How highly regarded is this racial or ethnic identity by a society as a whole?

With the same identity in mind, answer the following three questions.

- Use three ways in which this racial or ethnic identity is viewed positively by a society.
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- Use three ways in which this racial or ethnic identity is viewed negatively by society.
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- Use three aspects of your racial or ethnic identity that the world does not know or appreciate.
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

6 *Yellow Face*

Page 6

## Pages 5–6: Synopsis of *Yellow Face*

**Rationale:** Students will be better positioned to appreciate the jokes and the substantial issues raised by *Yellow Face* if they arrive with prior knowledge regarding the plot. In addition, the play utilizes several structural innovations as a “documentary drama.” It is important that the students be familiar with the cultural context of the Asian-American experience before attending the play. These ideas are explored more deeply in the post-play section of the Discovery Guide.

**Exercise: Review the synopsis**  
 Here is a simple way to introduce the play to the students.

- The play tells the story of an Asian-American playwright who unwittingly hires a non-Asian actor to portray the Asian lead-character in his new play.
- The play mixes fact and fiction, combining real-life and imaginary characters and events in order to make its points about racial identity in America.
- The characters are forced to make decisions regarding their personal racial identity and their relationship to racial identity.

Read the synopsis of the play in the Discovery Guide and discuss. Have students identify the main characters and supporting characters. Identify the main characters’ objectives and conflicts that arise in the plot.

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

## Exercise: Race & the Law

Have students review the sidebar titled “The Legal Side of Race,” concerning issues raised in casting for theatre, film and television. Ask students if they have ever attended a job interview. Ask students if the issue of race is important in an employment decision. Ask students if they have ever encountered racial discrimination in a hiring situation.

**Exercise:** Before starting the “self-identity” exercise, reestablish the idea of your classroom as a “safe space.”

Direct the classroom to revisit the affirmations regarding freedom of speech, individual rights and the importance of heritage in a democratic society. Ask students to fill in the blanks in the exercise regarding their own racial or ethnic identity. Write the numbers 1-10 on the board (designating 1 as the lesser degree and 10 as the greater degree) to assist students in assigning a “number value” to the questions regarding the importance, obviousness and degree of respect paid to their racial or ethnic identity. Regarding the positive and negative perceptions of their racial or ethnic identity in #5 and #6, encourage students to fill in the blanks with detailed substantive phrases or full complete sentences. In responding with short-answers to #6, encourage students to tap their own unique personal experiences and insights.

# BEFORE THE PLAY

**Now Squint**

A NON-ASIAN ACTOR cast in an Asian role seems make-up to “squint” his eyes and change his skin tone, takes on a different manner of gesture and walk, and alters his voice to an “Oriental” accent to approximate Asian speech.

The practice is known as “yellowface”—a reference to its cousin, “blackface”—and it has permeated the history of performance in western culture. It originated at a time before Asian actors had arrived to the west to be available for Asian roles. The practice of yellowface, however, continued even after the arrival of talented and skilled Asian performers. One explanation is that theatrical and film producers were more comfortable with a white box-office name than an Asian unknown. Asian actors were relegated to minor roles as servants, laundymen, cooks or enemy soldiers.

Long after blackface was deemed racist, yellowface roles endured on stage, film and television. Hollywood celebrities who have worn yellowface include Fred Astaire, Ingrid Bergman, Marlon Brando, Katherine Hepburn, Jerry Lewis, Ricardo Montalban and John Wayne, among many others. Mickey Rooney played a nonsensical comic-gone-parody of a Japanese man in the movie *Bushyair at Topsy’s* and Yul Brynner built a career around his portrayal of the Siamese king in the musical *The King and I*.

And yellowface hasn’t gone away: John Belushi created a famous Samurai character on Saturday Night Live. Eddie Murphy wore yellowface in his current film release, *North*. As these examples suggest, yellowface is used for comic effect. For some reason, people still find yellowface funny, while blackface is perceived as offensive.

Recently, the producers of *Mulan* of a *Cat in the Hat* came under fire for casting Chinese actors in the lead Japanese characters. Sandra Oh, an actress of Korean Canadian descent, tweeted, “Ralph Fiennes can play an English person, a German person, a Polish person, a Jewish person, and no one gives a f— I have big problems when people purchase tickets on this.” Even so, asserts Marty White, a Boston University anthropology professor, “Americans are too often oblivious to distinctions between Asian cultures, and Hollywood should not be encouraging that.”



**Vocabulary**

**Oriental** Of or pertaining to the Orient or far East; considered offensive because it is a label imposed by the West.

**Remade** To remake or substitute an object or thing to a complete and thorough degree.

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## NOW SQUINT: Page 7

**BEFORE THE PLAY**

**Passing** In American racial politics, passing is leading others to believe, either through knowing deception or silence, that you belong to a racial or ethnic group other than your own. The term is typically used derogatory; it is not considered “politically correct” to even attempt or aspire to pass — much less do it successfully.

Despite this standard, passing is common in America. During the 19th century, Jewish, Irish and Italian immigrants, among many others, were blamed for draining jobs and increasing the demand on social services like police protection, fire stations, sanitation and schools. In response to these pressures, discrimination against immigrants increased. They were excluded from employment opportunities, housing, hotels and restaurants. To escape these abuses, many immigrants changed their names, shed their accents and even abandoned their religion to reinvent themselves as members of mainstream America.

**Exercise**

Write a brief essay describing a time when you passed or wished you could pass as a different race or ethnicity. What was the situation? How did or might you have accomplished the passing? What advantages could you gain by being perceived as someone you are not? Is it worth it to do so? Is it anyone’s business if you do?

*The idea is if we don’t look out the white race will be — will be utterly submerged... Well, these looks are all scientific... This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or those other races will have control of things.* —Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

■ Yellow Face

## Page 8

### Pages 7–8: Now Squint

**Rationale:** Students may be so accustomed to “yellowface” performance that they lack any context or perspective as to why it would be offensive to Asian-Americans. In this regard, the history and background of yellowface is crucial to an appreciation of the political edge of *Yellow Face*.

**Exercise:** Review the history and background of yellowface in the essay titled “Now Squint.” Discuss the differences (and similarities) between “yellowface” and “blackface.” Examine the quotation by actress Sandra Oh regarding ethnic casting. Ask students if they understand, agree or identify with her statement. Why and why not? What about casting Latino actors in nationalities not their own? How is that the same or different?

**Exercise:** Review the sidebar titled “Passing” regarding the social practice of leading others to believe that you belong to a racial or ethnic group other than your own. Ask students if they can identify the reasons why someone would act on an impulse to “pass.” Ask students if they are familiar with anyone who successfully passes as another racial or ethnic group. How might one successfully accomplish that goal? Ask students if they are familiar with anyone who unsuccessfully attempted to “pass.” How and why did they fail? Do students feel it is wrong to try to pass? What judgments and stereotypes do they harbor about passing?

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

**Exercise:** Allow the students time to compose a brief essay regarding their own impulse or wish to “pass” as a different race or ethnicity. Encourage students to tap their unique personal experience and insights into race and ethnicity. Students should explain the reasons behind the attempt or desire to pass, as well as to identify the race or ethnicity they attempted to impersonate. Instruct students to describe the outcome of their attempt to pass, whether successful or unsuccessful. Encourage students to weigh a value judgment on the advantages and disadvantages of passing. *Allow students with no real passing story to use their imaginations. Inventing an experience (flattering or unflattering) is thematically in line with the play and the unit. It is not necessary to divulge whether the story is truth or fiction.*



# AFTER THE PLAY

**AFTER THE PLAY**

## The Land of the Sunrise Meets The Land of Opportunity

**ASIA IS THE LARGEST** and most populated continent on Earth, containing 49 nations and more than 60% of the entire world's human population. As the seat of many early civilizations, Asia is diverse and ancient. It is often viewed as a cultural concept encompassing many traditions, beliefs, and peoples. At the same time, Asia is most also be appreciated as a society not unlike our own, in which people raise families in cities and towns, hold diverse jobs, educate their kids in schools, take comfort in religion and enjoy the arts, pop culture and sports.

Like most immigrant populations, Asians were drawn to America as the "land of opportunity," but they have been consistently excluded from the opportunities and civil rights enjoyed by other Americans. Early Asian immigrants were lured by the Gold Rush of 1849 and by work opportunities on the Transcontinental Railroad of the 1850s, barring the entire Chinese ethnic group from American soil. The rights of Chinese Americans who remained were severely curtailed until the arrival of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. These restrictions forced the Chinese American community to ghettoize itself in cities across America—in neighborhoods still identified today as "Chinatowns."

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Japanese Americans were identified as a security risk by the United States government. Consequently, 120,000 Japanese Americans were confined to "internment camps." Fifty years later, the U.S. legislature issued an official apology for these actions. There and many other examples illustrate a clear pattern of widespread discrimination against Asian-Americans, based on the U.S. government's relationship with their society of origin.

Currently, the Asian-American population encompasses citizens largely of Chinese and Filipino descent, along with East Indian, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese and approximately 20 other national-origin groups. While most immigrant populations in America have experienced blame for unemployment suffered by the mainstream population, the Asian-American experience specifically has been aggravated by the perception that Asian-Americans are "all the same." This misconception resulted in the brutal 1981 murder of Victor Chin, young Chinese American, outside a Domino bar by auto workers who believed their factory jobs would be lost to auto industry in Japan. Chin's death—and the lenient treatment meted by his killers in the judicial system—galvanized the Asian-American community to protest his unfair and unjust treatment in America.

Even so, little has changed. In 1996 the Democratic Party was accused of illegally accepting money from Asian countries and businessmen trying to buy influence. In the aftermath of this investigation, any political contribution with an Asian name attached was automatically scrutinized for a potentially unlawful purpose. In 1999, Dr. Wen Ho Lee, a research scientist at the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory, was arrested and charged with 33 counts of mishandling classified information. Although never charged with actual espionage, Dr. Lee was denied bail, kept in solitary confinement and forced to wear his handcuffs and chain for nine months, presumably because of his Asian ethnic identity. Ultimately, the prosecution dropped all but one minor charge against Dr. Lee.

*and on next page...*

## Page 9–11: The Land of the Sunrise Meets the Land of Opportunity

**Rationale:** Students will better appreciate *Yellow Face* if they know something about the unique history and background of Asian-Americans and can relate that knowledge to their own racial or ethnic identity. Students should be aware that Asian-Americans encompass a group that represents many nations. Our objective here is to emphasize the universal nature of prejudice and discrimination. Familiarity with the unique and particular incidence of discrimination suffered by Asian-Americans will cultivate empathy among students from cultures who were subjected to similar injustices in their own racial and ethnic communities (e.g. derogatory names, job discrimination, housing discrimination, stereotypes, segregation, etc.).

**Exercise:** Review the brief essay on “The Dong People.” Ask students if they understand the concept of “cultural purity.” Can they identify habits, customs or traditions that their own culture has absorbed from other cultures? (e.g. foods, fashion trends, music styles, personal grooming, etc.)

**Exercise:** Read the quotations from the late civil rights activist Malcolm X and basketball star Kareem Abdul Jabbar. Ask the students if they understand or identify with the statements. Ask why or why not.

**Exercise:** Provide classroom time or create a homework assignment to complete the exercise entitled “We Are Not So Different.” Ask students to write a narrative paragraph comparing and contrasting their own life or their heritage with some aspect of the Asian-American experience. Use the space provided in the Discovery Guide.

## THE LAND OF THE SUNRISE MEETS THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY: Page 9

**AFTER THE PLAY**

Despite these setbacks, the Asian-American community remains an active and aggressive participant in the political process. Through campaign contributions and lobbying, in state and federal courts, and with boycotts, petitions, letter-writing campaigns, newspaper editorials and coalitions with non-Asian organizations, the Asian-American community's voice has been heard. Despite internal divisions on political issues, the community can claim to several prominent Asian American politicians including Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao and former Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta. This perseverance is a great testament to the determination of Asian-Americans to be fully recognized as equal citizens in the American experience.

**Vocabulary**

Characterize: To isolate, to put or collect in a ghetto.

*We've got to remember the Chinese are everywhere... not only in our jobs that make our nuclear weapons and development, but also in the technology to deliver them. They're real. They're here. And probably in some ways, very subtly present. —Sen. Richard Blumenthal during investigation of the nuclear weapons cap charge on NBC's Meet The Press, March 1999.*

*We have to change our own mind... We've got to change our own minds about each other. We have to see each other with new eyes. We have to come together with warmth. —Obama*

*I expect more people from China and Asia to end up in the NBA. —Kareem Abdul Jabbar*

**The Dong People**

Situated deep inside China, the Dong people is a population of about three million people who live in innumerable small villages among the hilly border regions of three Chinese provinces. The Dong people are renowned for their unique architecture, in particular the “wind and rain bridge” and “drum towers.”

*“Their music sounds so un-Chinese,” observes playwright Huang, “in many ways similar to Eastern European singing.” The fusion of cultures that is evident in Dong music suggests that “there is no such thing as cultural ‘purity’ or ‘authenticity.’” The playwright intends that Marcell’s acceptance among the Dong people should “convey an imaginative Utopia, a place where we can get beyond issues of race and difference.”*

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

**Exercise:** Read the quotations by actor George Takei and Senator Richard Shelby. Ask students whether they understand, identify or agree with these statements. Why and why not?

# AFTER THE PLAY

AFTER THE PLAY

## The Play's the Thing

DAVID HENRY HWANG's *Yellow Face* is a wild, free-wheeling mix of playwrighting forms. On one hand, it works as political satire, mocking social and political institutions for the sake of comedy – in the vein of *Saturday Night Live* or *The Daily Show*. Of course, *Yellow Face* doesn't imply play for laughs. The play also presents a serious "documentary drama," comparable to *The Laramie Project* or David Hare's *Stuff Happens*, chronicling real events with real people's real words. In addition, with a nod to reality television, Hwang playfully inserts himself among the cast of characters, leaving the audience to decipher fact from fiction. Naturally, it is tempting to trust the character of the playwright as a reliable voice in the play, but, in truth, every character speaks on behalf of being – so all bets are off.

Hwang suggests that *Yellow Face* could be considered a theatrical spin on the "mockumentary," a fictional tale told in the conventions of a film documentary. Successful examples include the television series *The Office*, *Sucka Bitch*, *Carters*, *Barat* and Christopher Guest's *This is Spinal Tap*. However, "in a pure mockumentary," the playwright explains, "the audience knows what they are watching is fiction." In *Yellow Face*, the audience may believe they are watching a stage documentary [but] ... begin to doubt whether the events portrayed actually happened." Hwang's intention is to blur the lines between fact and fiction in the same way that celebrities blur the truth in matters of race, personal identity and cultural authenticity.

### Exercise: Find the Playwright

Identify a statement, incident or character trait that Hwang included in the play to make the playwright look good. Do you think it really happened? Why or why not?

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Identify a statement, incident or character trait that Hwang included to make the playwright look not so good. Do you think it really happened? Why or why not?

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THE PLAY'S THE THING: Page 12

### Exercise: My So-Called Life

Finally offering on his own personality, Hwang crafts a new autobiography for himself in *Yellow Face*, part truth, part fiction – not unlike someone crafting an internet profile on myspace.com. Write an autobiography, including an anecdote about a time you experienced prejudice – but here's the trick: mix truth and fiction. Use your answers in this Discovery Guide for inspiration.

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## Pages 12–14: The Play's The Thing

**Rationale:** Students' appreciation of the play will be enhanced when they develop an appreciation for the form, structure and perspective implemented by the playwright in approaching the material. The playwright constructs an elaborate mix of fact and fiction in *Yellow Face*. Students will benefit by attempting to incorporate this form of "creative non-fiction" into their own autobiographies.

**Exercise:** *Yellow Face* unfolds unlike a typical narrative play script. Here, actors appear in multiple roles, both fictional and "real," inside and outside the action, subjectively inhabiting scenes and objectively narrating action. Real-life events occur alongside "made-up" storylines with no attempt to distinguish what's real from what's not. The playwright appears as a character but it is unclear whether he is reliable or not. The audience is left to decide on its own. Read the brief essay and Hwang's comments regarding the "mockumentary" style of his script. Ask students if they understand or identify with his statements. What is a "documentary"? Is Hwang "mocking" the documentary form here? Or does the mixture of truth and fiction liberate his story and create new possibilities? Engage the students in a dialogue regarding the combination of real-life and fictional events in "reality television." Is that what's going on here in *Yellow Face*? How is this play different from reality television? How is it the same?

**Exercise:** Review the play synopsis on page 5 and encourage students to reflect on their own recollection of "what happened" in the play. Ask students to identify a statement, incident or character trait that the playwright included to make himself look good. Ask students to justify why the statement, incident or trait they selected reflects on the playwright in a positive light. Use the space provided in the Discovery Guide.

Repeat the process looking for a statement, incident or character trait that the playwright included to make himself look not so good. Ask students to justify why the statement, incident or trait they selected reflects on the playwright in a negative light. Use the space provided in the Discovery Guide.

# AFTER THE PLAY



THE PLAY'S THE THING: Page 14

## Pages 12–14: The Play's The Thing (cont'd)

**Exercise:** Review the instructions for the exercise entitled “My So-Called Life.” Ask students to revisit and identify a specific incident of prejudice from their own lives. It could be a small and petty happening or a more substantial and significant event. In addition, the student need not have been the victim of prejudice. He or she could have been the active perpetrator of prejudice, or a passive accomplice or bystander. The assignment is to describe the event – but to embellish the “real-life” account with fictional assertions regarding statements, incidents or character traits. Alternatively, students could create a completely fictional event illustrating their true character. Suggest that students describe the event as it might be re-enacted on reality television, heightening the truth by exaggerating the circumstances. Encourage students to revisit their short answers to other sections of the Discovery Guide as source material in this regard. The stories should be believable; students should not exaggerate the story into the realm of science fiction or fantasy. The story should exist in the credible world; the student author alone should be able to identify fact from fiction in his or her account. Use the space provided in the Discovery Guide.

**Exercise:** Review the instructions to the exercise entitled “You Can’t Handle the Truth.” Ask the students to identify a true and fictional element in their essays and answer the corresponding questions. Encourage students to be as candid and self-aware as they are able under the circumstances. Ask for volunteers to share their responses.

# AFTER THE PLAY



CONCLUDING REMARKS: 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 *Yellow Face* 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 incidents of prejudice in their own lives. Post the list on the board.
- Encourage students to list aspects of their lives in which the line between truth and fiction can be easily blurred. Post that list on the board.

**Optional 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. at the following address.

P.L.A.Y.  
Center Theatre Group  
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Los Angeles, CA 90012