



PLAYWRIGHT

JOCELYN
BIOH

Jocelyn Bioh is a Ghanaian-American performer and playwright that was born, raised, and still lives in New York City. Her parents emigrated from Ghana in the late 1960s. Bioh is dedicated to telling stories that break stereotypes, especially about African people. As an acting student at The Ohio State University, she was only cast in two plays (one of the roles was a cockroach!), and she realized that if she wanted better parts, she had to start writing them.

“I WANT,
FOR ONCE IN MY LIFE,
TO FINALLY
BE SEEN!”

—ELOISE,
School Girls



DIRECTOR

REBECCA
TAICHMAN

Rebecca Taichman is a Tony Award-winning director who believes in theatre’s potential to increase empathy, inviting an audience to see through someone else’s eyes, someone else’s heart. Moments after becoming the sixth woman in history to win a Tony Award for Directing, Rebecca said, “The inequity is undeniable. I hope this win encourages women directors, producers, writers all over — of every race, perspective, class, approach, culture, style — to tell stories that matter to them. We need more diversity on our stages.”

Written by Lynn Clark.

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Discovery Guide

SCHOOL GIRLS



OR, THE AFRICAN MEAN GIRLS PLAY

HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO TO BE QUEEN BEE?

School Girls takes place in the West African country of Ghana. The year is 1986.

A group of teenagers at the Aburi Girls Boarding School is preparing to compete for the title of Miss Ghana. The school’s queen bee, Paulina, is confident that she will be the winner. Her hive-minded friends agree. The girls are taken by surprise when a new student, Ericka, unexpectedly arrives on the scene. Her presence is a game changer. As the pageant approaches, the characters strive to hold on to their self-esteem as they face challenges involving beauty standards, colorism, teenage angst, and the desire to feel accepted.

Jocelyn Bioh’s comedy explores the universal similarities (and glaring differences) facing teenage girls across the globe.



"I FOUND THE GREATEST LOVE OF ALL INSIDE OF ME"

—Whitney Houston pop hit written by Linda Creed and Michael Masser

TEENAGE ANGST

BELONGING, BULLYING, AND BEYOND

TEENAGERS ARE CONSTANTLY GROWING, evolving, and forming identity. Often, they face tough choices in order to "fit in" socially, to feel a sense of belonging. Bullying is another challenge for teenagers. Meanness is sometimes seen as strength, and it can be a way to force peers to "belong." Paulina, the queen bee, controls her group with this type of "strength" until the new girl, Ericka, appears, and offers something different to the girls.

With all that teenagers face, it is hard to remember to love yourself in the midst of everyday challenges. The characters in *School Girls* learn valuable life lessons about beauty standards, friendship, and self-esteem as they go through the process of participating in the Miss Ghana pageant.



Have you ever given anything up, or changed something about yourself, to fit into a group?

What can you do to remind yourself of your own worth and beauty?

"I mean, you're my best friend and I really need you to look good Ama."

—PAULINA, *School Girls*



How do others see you? How do you see yourself? What are the differences between the two?

Is it important for you to be seen? Why or why not?

STANDARDS OF BEAUTY

BEAUTY STANDARDS ARE THE EXPECTATIONS that society places on us to look a certain way in order to be seen as attractive and valued. If we do not meet these expectations, we may be excluded from certain social groups.

As the characters in *School Girls* become involved in the Miss Ghana competition, they come face-to-face with the beauty standards of their community and of the world at large. Some characters are participating half-heartedly, because they think they know who will win, and it won't be them. The new girl in town is participating to make friends. Other characters are much more competitive and will do anything to win. They are desperate to be seen.

In *School Girls*, whether they're preparing for the beauty pageant or hanging out on campus, the characters constantly strive to fulfill the beauty standards placed on their community. The results can be painful because they end up being shamed by others and feeling ashamed of themselves.

"We have a reputation to maintain. To stay fit. Looking fine-fine. All the time."
—MERCY AND GIFTY, *School Girls*

COLORISM IS A FORM OF BIAS that is connected to racism. Racism is a system of power and privilege assigned by a dominant racial group. Colorism assigns advantages to certain people depending on the lightness or darkness of their skin color. Often, colorism exists between people who belong to the same racial or cultural group.

Some of the teenagers and adults in *School Girls* have embraced the belief that having lighter skin will make them more popular and successful. In fact, one character goes to great lengths to lighten her skin by using a bleaching cream she knows could severely burn her face.

Eloise, the pageant recruiter, is well aware of the colorism that exists on a global level. She is determined to have a light-skinned Miss Ghana to send to the Miss Universe pageant, no matter who enters the contest.

She sees this as a way of increasing her country's odds of winning, and, therefore, bringing Ghana from the outskirts of world society to the center.

COLORISM



Many of the characters in *School Girls* believe that having light skin can bring a person or group to society's center. What else can bring a person or group to the center?

Who is on the outskirts of our society? How do they get access to the more powerful center?

MERCY: Oh, so then it would be no problem if the winner of Miss Italy had black skin?

GIFTY: Oh please! You know there would be many problems with that.

—*School Girls*



MaameYaa Bofo. Photo by Joan Marcus.