

## WELCOME

Center Theatre Group is very excited to bring you access to our archival performance of *Father Comes Home From The Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)* by Suzan-Lori Parks, which was presented live at the Mark Taper Forum in spring 2016.

We believe a great play raises questions about the human condition, and a great educational experience allows students an opportunity to reflect upon those questions and begin to discover their own answers.

We have designed these activities and the companion videos to help you prepare your students to see the play and to follow up the performance with options for discussion, reflection, and creativity. During the videos, you can have your students follow the Teaching Artists and just pause the video when needed.

### PRE-SHOW GOALS

Introduce the play, playwright and themes of play

Build curiosity about some of the big ideas in this play

Provide information about the story, style and Inspiration for the piece

### Activities (pages 2-9)

01—Introduction and Overview (5:11)

02—Loyalty (4:56)

03—Chorus: Style of the Play (15:22)

04—Worth and Value (13:10)

05—Freedom Day (10:43)

xx—Closure (no video)

### POST-SHOW GOALS

Reflect on the art. What is staying with you?

Examine how this play connects to our lives and world

Artistically explore ideas from the play

### Activities (pages 10-17)

06—Reflection (1:19)

07—What's in a Name? (6:47)

08—Barometer-Choices (12:12)

09—Wagon Wheel, Then and Now (3:12)

10—Freedomville (14:48)

11—Closure (3:44)

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

In *Father Comes Home From The Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*, playwright Suzan-Lori Parks starts with a moment in history—the Civil War—that happened over 150 years ago. She explores this history with the help of an even older story: the Greek epic poem *The Odyssey*.

Suzan-Lori Parks says “The title was the beginning of it...”

And this play has 4 titles:

The overall title is *Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*

Part 1: A Measure of A Man

Part 2: A Battle in the Wilderness

Part 3: The Union of My Confederate Parts

Why do you think the playwright gave her play four different names?

What feelings or images come to mind when you hear these titles?

Is there one title that makes you the most curious?

Variation: use the Zoom poll feature to start a discussion of the titles

*Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)* is part of a nine-play cycle about three African-American families and the wars that surround their lives. Parts 1 through 3 take place during the Civil War. Parts 4 through 9 will follow the descendants of these Civil War characters up to the present day.

In Parts 1, 2 and 3 we meet Hero, a slave. Hero is offered his freedom if he will go with his master to serve in the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy. Hero must decide whether to stay or to go, whether to believe in the possibility of freedom or to realize that this may be another empty promise.

*\*Note to Educators: If you want to know more specifics – before seeing the play – both the Discovery Guide and the Educator Resources provide a detailed synopsis. We have also shared a copy of the script if you want to read the play with your class before or after seeing the production.*

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAYWRIGHT, SUZAN-LORI PARKS

A MacArthur “Genius” Award recipient, Suzan-Lori Parks was the first African-American woman to receive the Pulitzer Prize (in 2002) for *Topdog/Underdog*.

She was a 2015 Pulitzer Prize finalist for *Father Comes Home From The Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*, for which she won the 2015 Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama. She received a Tony Award® in 2012 for her work on *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*.

Her plays include *The Book of Grace*, *In the Blood* (2000 Pulitzer Prize finalist), *Venus* (1996 Obie Award), *365 Days/365 Plays*, and *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*. She’s also written a novel, “Getting Mother’s Body” (Random House). Her first film was “Girl 6”, written for Spike Lee. Her adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston’s “Their Eyes Were Watching God” premiered on ABC’s Oprah Winfrey Presents. Parks is currently writing a television show for Amazon and a live stage musical adaptation of the film “The Harder They Come”.

*\*Note to Educators: There is an interview with her in the Discovery Guide if you would like to know more.*

## LOYALTY

### Objectives

- Introduce the theme of Loyalty in *Father Comes Homes From the Wars* (Parts 1, 2 & 3)
- Make personal connections to the ideas of loyalty through reflection, discussion and art-making

### Activity

#### Check-in

Ask the class to share their name and something/someone they are loyal to.

#### Reflection

Close your eyes or soft focus. Breathe-in and out. This is a private reflection. You might choose to share your thoughts. You might keep them just for you. Both are good.

Playwright Suzan-Lori Parks feels this play has three types of loyalty: honest, faithful, true. Which one best describes you? Why? When or where is it HARD to be honest, faithful, or true? Where or with whom are you the MOST honest, faithful or true?

As you watch the play, notice which characters seem honest or faithful or true. Who and what are they loyal to?

Take a breath in and out. Open your eyes.

#### Group Discussion

Ask the class which of the three types of loyalty most describes them/ or most intrigues them and then divide into breakout rooms based on honest, faithful or true. In the small groups, have the participants discuss their word: what does it mean to them, why they choose it, how does it connect to loyalty?

Have the small groups share back with the whole class.  
Discuss the commonalities and differences.

#### Tableau Statues

After discussing their word in the break out rooms, each individual or small group can sculpt and title a frozen image that represents their word. Remind the group to focus on communication, showing us the emotions, action, characters that best express their word.

Share these group statues and let the class observe the commonalities and differences before moving into a whole group discussion.

## CHORUS (STYLE OF THE PLAY)

### Objectives

- Introduce the theatrical convention of a Greek chorus
- Work together as an ensemble
- Gain a deeper understanding of chorus through a group creation

### Activity

In *Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*, the playwright Suzan Lori-Parks includes a theatrical convention called a “Greek chorus,” which is essentially a group of actors who describe and comment on the play’s action and characters.

These actors work together as an ensemble, using their bodies and voices to help the audience understand the story; this includes song and movement. Before we dive into themes, we’ll explore what to expect of the style of the show.

1. Mirror Activity (whole class): What made that activity easy/challenging?
2. Who Started the Motion? (whole class): What strategies did you discover worked well?
3. You as Greek Chorus (breakout groups): “Mini” performances



Share group performances and discuss. What stood out to you? What helped you understand the text? Was it easier to perform as soloists or as a group? Why?

As you watch the play, think about who the “Greek Chorus” is and how they affect your experience of the story. After you’ve seen the show, can you think of any instances in which “Greek choruses” exist today?

## WORTH AND VALUE

### Objectives

- Introduce the themes of worth and value in *Father Comes Home From the Wars* (Parts 1, 2 & 3)
- Explore who and what is valued/not valued in our present day society
- Reflect on what you personally value and how you measure your own worth

### Activity

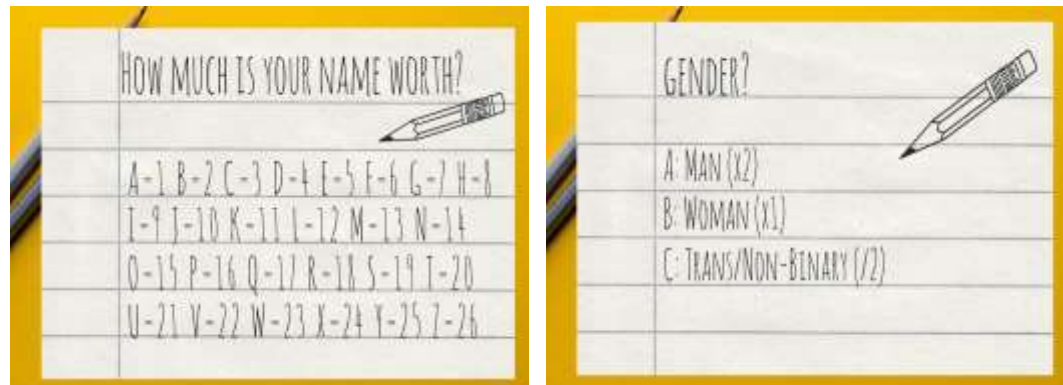
*Father Comes Home From the Wars* (Parts 1, 2 & 3) takes place in 1862 Texas during the American Civil War. In part one, *A Measure of a Man*, we meet several characters who are enslaved. They are the property of their Boss-Master who paid a sum of money for each one of them. Hero is Boss-Master's favorite and most valuable. In part two, *A Battle in the Wilderness*, Boss-Master asks, "What is Hero worth? In dollars and cents?"

How do we measure worth today? In addition to money, what are the ways we place value on people?

Let's play a game. Let's measure ourselves based on what society values and see how much we're worth. By society, we mean the messages we receive from the media, family, friends, school and other systems in place that tell us about what is valuable and how much a person is worth.

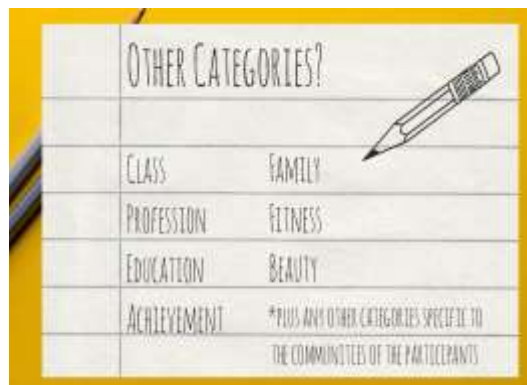
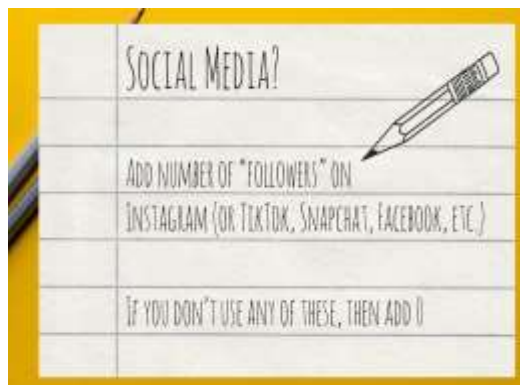
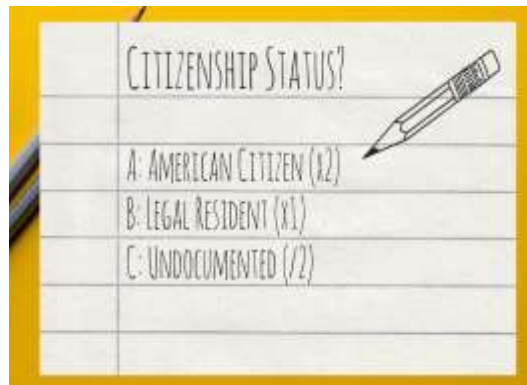
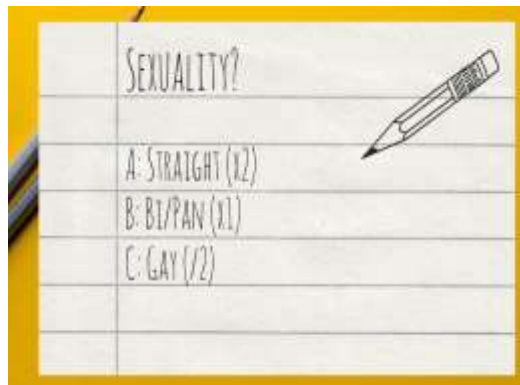
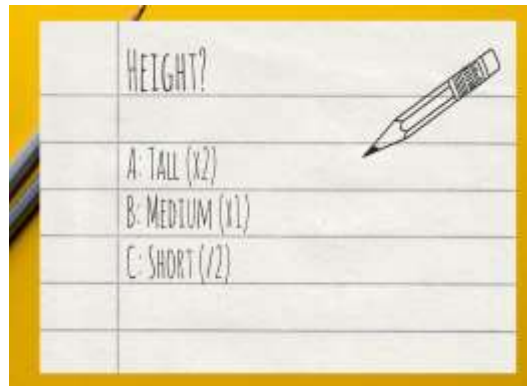
To start off, let's use our first names as a frivolous way to assign each of us a base worth.

Visit: [Letter Value Calculator](#)



Now let's complicate our worth by measuring ourselves in different categories according to what society tells us.

*\*Note to Educators: Acknowledge that the following activity might be uncomfortable as students look at who/what is assigned value. Explain that the ways society/dominant culture assigns value/lack of value is explored in the show. Let students know that they are free to share their score at the end of this activity or to keep their score private.*



What is your sum total? How does your total compare with the other totals in the group? How does that make you feel? How did it feel to multiply by 2? How did it feel to divide by 2? What does this say about society and what it values?

What are some other ways of measuring worth that are community-specific?

What does your family value?

What does your school value?

What does your community value?

What does this country value?

What do you value?

How do you measure your own worth?

## FREEDOM DAY

### Objectives

- Introduce the theme of Freedom in *Father Comes Home From the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*
- Make a personal connection to freedom
- Work together as an ensemble to make decisions and create
- Explore an ideal day of freedom through conversation, collaboration and art-making

### Activity

Educators, group the students in 4 groups in breakout rooms. Students should choose their room based on their choice for an ideal living situation of freedom.

The choices are:

- Live Alone
- Stay with Family
- Live with friends
- Live with extended family

Once the students are in their breakout room, they will answer the following questions to create a collaborative vision of their ideal day of freedom. This may involve compromise or finding a way to make different answers work together.

Questions:

- What was bedtime like the day before?
- What time do you wake up?
- Where are you?
- Who are you with?
- What is your schedule?
- What do you do?
- How do you get around?
- What do you eat?

Share your answers with the whole group.

### Tableau/Frozen Pictures

Once they create their ideal day of Freedom in the break out rooms, each individual or small group can sculpt and title a frozen image that best represents their vision.

Remind the group to focus on communication, showing us the emotions, action, characters that best express their ideal day of Freedom.

Share these group statues and let the class observe the commonalities and differences before moving into a whole group discussion.



## **CLOSURE**

### **While you watch the play...**

Think about the ideas of loyalty, worth and value and freedom.

Notice the hard choices the characters have to make during this play.

Think about names. What is the story of your name? What is the power of a name?  
If you could rename yourself, what would you name yourself and why?  
Or would you keep your name, why?

We are going to look at names in the post-show workshop so come with your ideas!

Please enjoy *Father Comes Home From the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*.

## POST-SHOW REFLECTION

### Objectives

- Reflect on the experience of seeing the play for each individual student and for the whole class
- Notice the commonalities and differences in each person's theatre-going experience

### Activity

What's staying with you after seeing *Father Comes Home From The Wars* (Parts 1, 2 & 3)? An image, a moment, a feeling, a line from the play?

Which character were you most curious about? Why? If you could ask this character one question, what would you ask and why?

Who/what were the different characters loyal to? Do you think loyalty was always a good thing for the characters? Why? Why not?

Which character(s) did you think were faithful?

Which character(s) were true?

Which character(s) were honest?

What surprised you the most while watching the play?

How did the use of a chorus help your understanding of the story and the characters?

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

### Objectives

- Explore the use and choice of names in *Father Comes Home From The Wars* (Parts 1, 2 & 3)
- Explore the power of names, naming and choice
- Make personal connections between the play and the story of our own names

### Activity

Have you ever thought about your name and what it means to you? What is the story of your name (why you were given that name, the definition of your name etc.)? I want you to think about what you would change your name to if you were able to choose your own name? Would you change it? Would you keep it the same?

Take some time and think about that.

Now, I want you to update your zoom screen name. Use the rename function below your image on Zoom. If you would like to, share your name and choice. Why did you decide to change your name? Why did you decide to keep your name?

*\*Note to Educators: The above activity can lead into a discussion of the character names in Father Comes Home From The Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3).*

Why do you think the playwright chose the different names?

Why did she have Hero change his name in Part 3?

What is the power of a name?

In *Father Comes Home From The Wars*, Parts 1, 2, 3 you will meet characters whose names borrow from both the Greeks and the Civil War. There is a dog named Odd-see, a play on the words of the title of *The Odyssey*. A character is named Homer, the poet who wrote *The Odyssey*. The names give us clues about the characters and help connect this story with other stories in our shared history.

HERO: a slave. The main character.

- In Greek mythology, a priestess of Aphrodite who killed herself when her lover Leander was drowned.
- In mythology, a man of extraordinary strength and courage, celebrated for his deeds, often the offspring of a god and a mortal.
- The principal male character in a novel, play, movie, or TV show.

ULYSSES: Hero from Parts 1 & 2. He has changed his name.

- The roman/Latin version of Odysseus. The clever, resourceful, and mythological hero in Homer's *The Odyssey*.
- The first name of Civil War General Ulysses S. Grant, who became the 18th president of the United States.

PENNY: a slave. Hero's woman.

- A nickname for Penelope— the wife of Odysseus/Ulysses in The Odyssey. Penelope waits 10 years for her husband to return from war.

HOMER: a slave. He has one foot and is in love with Penny.

- Eighth-century Greek poet famous for the epic stories The Iliad and The Odyssey.

ODD-SEE: Hero's dog. His eyes go this way and that.

- The Odyssey (Odd-see) is an epic poem written by Homer in eighth-century Greece— about a man and his adventures trying to get back home after a long war.
- A long wandering or voyage, usually marked by many changes of fortune.

## BAROMETER: CHOICES

### Objective

- Explore the choices the characters made in *Father Comes Home from the Wars, Parts 1, 2, 3* and make connections to the choices we face in our own lives

### Activity

One of the big themes in *Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)* is making choices.

How do we make difficult choices? Is the unknown better than what I know now?

Using the stop/start video option in Zoom, ask participants to “join me if...”

- In part 1, if you were Hero, would you have stayed on the plantation or would you have gone with Bossmaster to fight for the Confederacy?
- In part 2, if you were Hero, would you have stayed with the Colonel or would you have gone with Smith to fight for the Union?
- In part 3, if you were Homer, with one foot, would you have stayed on the plantation or would you have gone with the runaways?

Once participants “join” by turning back on their video screens, have a few volunteers to share why they would make that choice.

Discuss Quote:

*“Both choices are  
Nothing more than the same coin  
Flipped over and over  
Two sides of the same coin  
And the coin ain’t even in your pocket.”*

## WAGON WHEEL

### Objectives

- Express individual reactions to the play and ideas in a one-on-one setting
- Make personal connections between the play's ideas, our world today and the students own lives
- Explore the power and purpose of stories, historically and personally

### Activity

This activity is a chance to discuss some of the ideas in the play with several different partners. In a physical room, you would make two circles facing each other. For each different question, one of the two circles would move a certain number of spaces to give everyone a new partner. If you are in Zoom, use breakout rooms for virtual circles.

The facilitator places the class in breakout rooms in pairs or trios. Give the participants at least 6 minutes in the breakout room to discuss, then bring them back to the main room and put them in different breakout rooms with a new partner for the next round.

### Round One

Share quote: "Whenever you write a history play, you are really writing about now."

With your partner in your breakout room discuss: How is this play about now? What did you see/hear/experience that felt like now?

### Round Two

Share quote:

"Old stories, they guide us  
They happened so far back...  
Years ago  
Years and years ago  
Years and years and years ago  
What could they have to do with you?"

With your partner in your breakout room discuss: What does this play have to do with you personally? Do you believe old stories guide us? How do they guide us?

### Round Three

In an interview, Playwright Suzan- Lori Parks said, "*Father Comes Home From The Wars* is inspired by my dad. It was not inspired by *The Odyssey*. *The Odyssey* is in our drinking water. So you get bits and pieces and shards and shrapnel of a lot of things."

With your partner in your breakout room discuss: What do you think Suzan-Lori Parks means when she says that "*The Odyssey* is in our drinking water"? What stories are in your family's or cultures' "drinking water"? What stories did you grow up being told?

Ask all participants to share what was discussed and discovered in the three rounds with the class.

# FREEDOMVILLE

## Objectives

- Further explore and articulate the abstract idea of “freedom”
- Make personal connections to the play’s theme
- Collaboratively envision, write, and perform an original artistic work

If you think back to the play, you might recall in Part 3 when the runaway slaves declare,  
“The place I’m going now is Freedom  
But where is Freedom, really?  
Will the air smell sweet?  
Will the streets be paved with gold?  
Will all in Freedomville welcome me with open arms?”

Keeping that in mind, we’re going to take a closer look at this idea of “Freedomville”.

## Personal Quickwrite

What does it mean to be free? What do you want **freedom from**? What do you want **freedom to**? What are the pros and cons of freedom?

## Breakout Group Activity

In your groups, work together to create your own Freedomville based on what freedom means to you. When we reconvene, each group will present their own “live action promo” to try to persuade others to come live in their Freedomville (you may use performative elements of Greek Chorus if you want).

IN YOUR GROUPS, CREATE YOUR OWN...

## FREEDOMVILLE

DISCUSS: What/where/who makes you feel the most free? Describe that activity, place, or person.

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**DETERMINE AS A GROUP:**

- What does Freedomville look, sound, taste, smell, and feel like?
- Who are the people that populate your Freedomville? What are they like?
- Where is Freedomville located?
- What is your motto/slogan?
- What is your Freedomville called? Give it a new name. Make it meaningful.

**MAKE YOUR PROMO POSTER:**

- Select a group leader to share screen.
- Together, select images to build a collage in Adobe Spark that will serve as your Freedomville's official promo poster.
- Save your collage.



Select images to build a collage in [Adobe Spark](#) that will serve as your Freedomville’s official promotional poster. Then, write and rehearse your “live action promo.”



Each group presents its pitch and poster for their Freedomville. Once everyone has shared, reflect and discuss: Would you stay in your current Freedomville, or would you move to another? Why? Why not?



## **CROWN**

### **Objectives**

- Reflect on self-worth and value
- Explore the value each human has just by virtue of being
- Celebrate the value of each individual in the group

### **Activity**

In an interview, Suzan-Lori Parks shared a quote from her college creative writing teacher, James Baldwin:

*“Your crown has been bought and paid for. All you have to do is put it on your head.”*

Share and/or discuss the quote with your class.

Share the idea that each of us is valuable and we cannot escape that value because it is already ours by virtue of the work and sacrifices of the people who have gone before us – family, community, or historical ancestors.

One individual will pantomime picking up a crown.

This crown represents your value, strength, greatness.

Put the crown on your head and take a moment to reflect on your worth/value.

After a moment of reflection, the student will “pass” the crown to another person in the class, saying their name. The final person to place the crown on their head will pass the crown back to the person who started the activity.

*\*Note to Educators, you can have your students share out loud what worth/value the crown represents OR just put it in their head in silence and feel their worth/value.*