

The Goodman Theatre  
Student Subscription Series  
2003-2004 Season

Teacher Guide

Crowns

Adapted and directed by  
Regina Taylor

Teacher Guide written and designed by  
Megan Welch, Education and Community Programs Coordinator

Edited and published by The Goodman Theatre  
Stacey Ballis, Director of Education and Community Programs  
Megan Welch, Education and Community Programs Coordinator

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# Art

## Project: Photography

1. Look at the photographs in the book *Crowns* by Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry. What do the portraits of these women reveal about each individual? As a collective, what do these portraits reveal about these African American women?
2. Regina Taylor adapted her play from this book. Pick one photograph from the book. Write a monologue from the perspective of the woman pictured in the portrait.
3. Visit the current photography exhibit at The Art Institute The James VanDerZee Studio. This exhibit has over 100 prints by the Harlem Renaissance portrait photographer. How does his work represent African American life during the Harlem Renaissance? What do the photographs suggest about the culture? What do the photographs suggest about the time period?
4. Find a family photograph that is important to you. Write a short story about what is captured in that photograph. If it is a portrait, write about who the person is and his/her relationship to you. If it is a candid photograph, what moment was captured? Why was that moment precious at the time? Why is it important to you now? If it is a posed group shot, who is together in the photograph? Why were they together?
5. Imagine that you need to create a photograph of someone, but you do not have a camera. Write a descriptive paragraph about this person so that someone could recognize him/her based on your description. Include both physical characteristics and personality traits.

# Drama

## Project: Compare and Contrast

1. **The Amen Corner:** Compare the role of congregation in *Crowns* and *The Amen Corner* by James Baldwin. How does it function in each play? Is one congregation more literal, or more abstract? How does the music sung by the congregation function within the context of the play? Does the music forward the plot? Define relationships? Establish atmosphere?
  2. **The Piano Lesson:** Both the piano in *The Piano Lesson*, by August Wilson, and many of the hats in *Crowns*, are passed along from one family member to another. What is meaningful about these inheritances? Describe the role of legacy in both plays. How do these two objects serve to connect one generation of a family to another generation? How is history embodied in these objects?
  3. **Drowning Crow:** Compare Regina Taylor's adaptation of *The Seagull* to her adaptation of the book *Crowns*. How do the sources for the adaptations differ? Describe how Taylor creates a particular cultural theme in her adaptations. Compare her use of poetic language in both pieces. Both *Drowning Crow* and *Crowns* focus on different generations of family and community. Discuss how each generation and community is reflected in each piece.
  4. **Aristotle's Poetics:** According to Aristotle, there are six elements to drama: *plot, character, thought/theme, music, spectacle, and diction*. Write an essay evaluating *Crowns* based upon these elements. Was there a particular element(s) that you felt was highlighted in this production? If so, why do you think that choice was made?
  5. **Dramatic Structure:** The key structural elements in most dramatic works are: *exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement*. The storytelling structure of *Crowns* is unique in that many of the women's memories of the past are shared through stories that serve to unite them. Discuss how these dramatic elements are woven into the storytelling of *Crowns*. Are all of these elements implemented?
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# History

## Project: In My Day...

1. Pick one of the images on this page from the Civil Rights movement. Write a creative story based on the image. Choose a perspective from which to write your story. Are you a reporter covering the event? Are you one of the individuals in the photograph?
2. Ask a grandparent or family member about a historic event that they remember from their past. Write a story based on his/her account. Try to find an image that represents that particular occurrence. Using that image as a starting point, create a collage to accompany your story. The collage should represent your family member's account; so it should represent both the historic event and your family member's personal perspective. Get creative with the collage; you can use newspapers, magazines, and/or photographs.
3. Look through a recent newspaper and find an image that strikes you. Write an editorial about what this image means to you. Does it represent something positive? Something negative? Something that needs



to be changed? Something that has caused great change already? Why does this particular photo speak “a thousand words” to you?

4. Both John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. are mentioned in *Crowns*. Research the life and work of either John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King, Jr. Now write an essay on one of the following topics:

- His importance and leadership in the development of the United States in his lifetime.
- The nation's response to his assassination.
- The legacy of his achievements today.

5. *Crowns* is a play about generations of women sharing stories of their past. Read about what characterizes one of the following generations of Americans:

- Generation X
- Generation Y

- Beat Generation
- Lost Generation
- Baby Boom Generation

Explain the significance of their label. What historic events defined their lives? What was the political climate like in the United States at that time?

6. Write a paragraph about what you believe distinguishes your generation from that of your parents and your grandparents. What title would you give your generation? Are there traditions that link the generations in your family?
  7. Read a slave narrative or a personal account of the Holocaust. Why are these personal accounts of history so important? What do you get out of reading one person's experience of slavery and/or the Holocaust versus reading statistics about these horrific historical events?
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# Literature

## Project: African American Women Writers

- ***For My Sister Molly Who in the Fifties*** by Alice Walker
    1. Compare how the African heritage is passed along to the narrator in this poem to the traditions passed along in *Crowns*.
    2. Discuss the theme of family in both this poem and in *Crowns*.
    3. Explain how the passage of time is addressed in both works.
    4. Pick two images from each work and discuss why they stand out to you as the reader.
    5. Find examples of word choice that you find powerful in both works. Does the diction indicate character traits? Time period? Tone?
  - ***Women*** by Alice Walker
    1. Discuss the theme of the ‘mother’s generation’ in both the poem and *Crowns*.
    2. Discuss the difference in the lives of the current generation compared to that of the generation before them. How do you get a sense of these differences from the poem? From the play?
    3. The speaker in the play calls the women of her mother’s generation ‘Headragged Generals’. Discuss what she means by this, and compare this image to the women portrayed in *Crowns*.
  - ***Ain’t I a Woman?*** by Sojourner Truth
    1. Identify the issues of Women’s Rights and Civil Rights in both the speech and in *Crowns*.
    2. Identify a reference to religion in both works. What is the significance of the reference?
    3. Discuss the significance of the title of both pieces.
    4. Discuss the role of women in both pieces.
  - ***Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*** by Harriet A. Jacobs
    1. Discuss the importance of this first person account of slavery. Compare this account to one story shared in *Crowns*. What makes each story unique? What does the story say about society during that time period? Does the story share something culturally significant? What can be learned from this story even today?
  - ***For My People*** by Margaret Walker
    1. Discuss the shared experiences of a culture over time in both the poem and in *Crowns*.
    2. Discuss the representation of time in both pieces.
    3. Compare and contrast two of the stanzas of the poem. What is each stanza about?
    4. Compare the ‘new beginning’ in the last stanza to the new beginning Yolanda experiences in *Crowns*.
    5. The title of the poem suggests a community. Write an essay about community using examples from both pieces.
  - ***Lineage*** by Margaret Walker
    1. Discuss the role of the grandmother, both in the poem and in *Crowns*.
    2. Discuss the theme of personal identity and familial and/or cultural past in both pieces.
  - ***Crusade for Justice*** by Ida B. Wells
    1. Discuss the significance of Ida B. Wells’ “Crusade for Justice” in the context of the Civil Rights Movement.
    2. Compare her experience to a story of struggle in *Crowns*.
  - ***senses of heritage*** by Ntozake Shange
    1. Discuss the role of heritage in both pieces.
    2. Discuss the role of talking and storytelling in sharing history and culture in both pieces.
    3. Compare the language in the poem to that of Yolanda’s first monologue. What about their use of language suggests youth rather than age?
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## Text Questions

### Prologue

1. Who delivers the prologue?
2. What information is shared through the prologue?
3. How does the prologue serve in setting up the rest of the play?
4. Describe the use of call-and-response in the Prologue Song.
5. What is Mother Shaw's quote regarding crowns?
6. What is the relationship between Yolanda and Mother Shaw?

### Act One, scene 1

1. What do the women do at the beginning of the scene?
2. Where was the only place that slaves could gather?
3. Describe the relationship between hats and status for black women.
4. How did Velum and her sister Lynne get revenge on their other sister, Myra?
5. Why was it Mother Shaw's responsibility to straighten her mother's hat for church?
6. How is a turban different from a hat?

### Act One, scene 2

1. What does the projection read in scene 2?
2. Define 'hattitude'.
3. Describe Yolanda's visit to church with her grandmother and new hat.
4. Why was Jeanette skeptical about the hat that Pam gave her?
5. Why would Jeanette lend out her children, but not her hats?
6. What are the "hat queen" rules?

### Act One, scene 3

1. Which two historic individuals' pictures were on the fans used at Wanda's church?
2. Describe the dress code at the church from Wanda's childhood.
3. What was Mother Shaw's title?
4. Describe what happened during Mabel's "Run and Tell That" sermon.
5. What was the "Run and Tell That" sermon about?
6. Why does Mabel wear a hat every Sunday?
7. Where is Yolanda from, and where does she live now?
8. Describe Yolanda's adjustment to her new high school.
9. Why did Yolanda dress in the manner that she did?

### Act One, scene 4

1. How did Mother Shaw manage to get new hats into the house, despite the disapproval of her husband?
2. Describe two moments between Mother Shaw and her husband caught by the 'camera'.

### Act One, scene 5

1. What did Wanda's Grandma Em do on the Sunday that something "was wrong?"
  2. What did Grandma Em's hats represent?
  3. Which two heirlooms does Wanda compare her grandmother's hat to?
  4. Two phrases are repeated by the ensemble regarding the legacy of hats. Write these two phrases.
  5. How does the man "transform" from Jeanette's father to a man working in his garden?
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## Text Questions

6. Why did Mabel's father call her and her sister 'boys'?
7. Why was it appropriate for Yolanda to wear a "fussy" hat to her brother's funeral?
8. Why did the limo driver help Yolanda out of the car first?
9. Why did Yolanda's mother send her to live with Mother Shaw?

### **Act One, scene 6**

1. Why is this scene entitled 'Baptism'?
2. What dress code rule did Mabel's friend break in 1958?
3. What exception did Dr. Player make in the dress code? When were the girls not expected to wear hats?
4. When were African Americans allowed to finally shop at Montaldo's?
5. Name two references to water made during the music in this scene.

### **Act One, scene 7**

1. Name a tradition traced back to Africa.
  2. Describe the final action of the play.
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## Essay Questions

### **Why *Crowns*?**

The term *crowns* is associated with power, prestige, and respect. Why do you think the play is titled *Crowns*, rather than “*Hats*”? Cite at least three examples from the text of women in the play who wear *Crowns*. What about each woman is deserving of a crown? Was it a strength in her character? An obstacle she had to overcome? A relationship that she wholeheartedly committed to? Why are these women from different times and different families all “queens”?

### **Individual and Community**

Explain how the storytelling structure of *Crowns* highlights both individuality and community. Pick one example of individuality. What is significant about this individual? What do you learn about this woman? What does she share in her monologue. Pick an example from the text that demonstrates community. What is the purpose of community in this play? If a monologue is the expression of an individual, what is used to express the community?

### **Female Roles**

As women, the characters in *Crowns* share the roles of mother, daughter, sister, and wife. Write about the significance of each female role, citing examples in the play. Does this role help define the character as an individual? What is the importance of the female bonds of mother and daughter, or grandmother and granddaughter? Describe the relationship between Yolanda and the other women in the play.

### **Pass the Hat**

Many of the women in *Crowns* cherish their church hat because it was handed down to them by a loved one. Discuss how the passing of the hat as an heirloom serves as a personal legacy in *Crowns*. Write about any historic significance of a church hat that has withstood the test of time.

### **Music**

Discuss the role of music in *Crowns*. How are the women united in music? How are their different generations distinguished by music? Describe how a variety of music can represent a particular culture over time.

*Onstage* 2001/02 Goodman Theatre Series Volume 17, Number 1, *Drowning Crow*  
“The Bird with the Song: An Interview with Regina Taylor”

1. Why did Regina Taylor create an adaptation of *The Seagull* with her play *Drowning Crow*?
2. Based upon what you have read in the *Onstage* article, what is the significance of generations in Taylor’s *Drowning Crow*? How does this significance of generations in *Drowning Crow* compare to the significance of generations in Taylor’s *Crowns*?
3. Why is social change relevant in *Drowning Crow*? What does social change mean to you?
4. How is slavery a part of the history of the characters in *Drowning Crow*?
5. Why are media important in *Drowning Crow*? How has the concept of media changed since the time Chekhov wrote *The Seagull* in the late 1800s?

*Onstage* 1998/99 Theatre Series Volume 14 Number, 3 *Oo-bla-dee* by Regina Taylor  
“Women in Jazz”

1. In the article there is a reference to some instruments being considered masculine and others feminine; what do you think about this gender assignment to musical instruments?
2. Give examples of the female musicians and singers mentioned in the article and what their musical talents were.
3. Compare the experiences of the female musicians quoted in the article. How are their experiences different, how are they similar?
1. What were some personality characteristics of many black female musicians in the 1940s?
2. How were black female musicians important in influencing jazz music?

*Onstage* 1998/99 Theatre Series Volume 14 Number 3 *Oo-bla-dee* by Regina Taylor  
“A Heartbeat to Everything: an Interview with Regina Taylor”

1. Why did Taylor write *Oo-bla-dee*?
2. Why were women in jazz originally viewed as “novelty” acts?
3. What research did Taylor do to create *Oo-bla-dee*?
4. What were some of the professional aspirations Taylor had before she decided to work in theatre? How did Taylor become involved in theatre?
5. How is Mary Lou Williams important to the creation of *Oo-bla-dee*?

**Supplemental Material**

**ONSTAGE 1998/99 Theatre Series Volume 14, Number 3**

**“Women in Jazz”**

**And**

**“A Heartbeat to Everything: An Interview with Regina Taylor”**

**Published by The Goodman Theatre**

**ONSTAGE 2001/2002 Theatre Series Volume 17, Number 1**

**“The Bird with the Song : An Interview with Regina Taylor”**

**Published by The Goodman Theatre**

**Excerpts from, African American Literature: Voices in Tradition**

**Published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc. 1992**

# Spatial Relations

## Master Class: *Ensemble Work*

### State Goal Addressed:

**Language Arts: 3B**

**Fine Arts Drama: 25A, 26A**

### Objectives:

- Understand the use of space onstage
- Identify how a stage picture tells part of a story
- Recognize balance and imbalance in a stage picture
- Work as a group to guide an individual with vocal cues
- Work as a group to complete an image

### Vocabulary Used in this Lesson:

*audience, blocking, concept, cue, downstage, ensemble, improv, stage left, stage picture, stage right, text, upstage*

**Prerequisite:** Understanding of stage directions (upstage and downstage).

**Materials Needed:** None

### Warm-up: Cover the Space

1. Create an open space, free of desks and chairs.
2. Without talking or touching, have your students move about the space, trying to cover any empty space available.
3. When you say “freeze,” the students will freeze where they are. Point out any areas that need to be filled in. Have them start again. Remind them that there is no talking or contact, therefore eye contact is important.
4. Once they are used to moving around the space, you can give them instructions to change the activity a bit. Have them move around in pairs or groups, holding hands. Another variation is to have them create shapes together. Without talking, group together to form triangles or squares.
5. If the students do not know each other very well, have them get into groups based on their name. For example, have them group together by the first letter in their name. You can also pick other common characteristics, such as what type of shoes or accessories they are wearing.

### Warm-up: Jungle

1. Using the same playing space from *Cover the Space*, have students form a circle.
2. Have the students throw objects about the space. Make sure the objects are not sharp; things such as jackets, shoes, books, and keys work well.
3. Spread out the objects so that the space is well covered.
4. One student will volunteer to be the explorer. The explorer will try to get to the point directly across the circle with his/her eyes closed.
5. The rest of the students will use vocal sounds to guide the explorer around the objects. If the explorer touches an object, he/she is stuck in the jungle.
6. Remember: Students cannot use words to direct the explorer, only sounds. They must work together since they will all be making sounds for a sole purpose. The other students cannot communicate with each other about how to direct the explorer.

### Warm-up: Balanced Picture

1. Have your students get into groups of 4 or 5.
2. They will either improv a scene or read a scene from a text.
3. If they are reading from a text, have them act it out as they read in, in the space defined as the “stage” area.
4. At some point while they are running the scene, say “freeze.” At this point, have them look around at

- the other members in the group. Is anyone directly in front of you? Is someone between you and the audience? Are you blocked? Are all of you on one side of the playing space?
5. Have your students imagine a seesaw; if all of the weight is on one end, the other end will be up in the air; off balance.
  6. Have them run their scene again, but with focus on keeping a balanced stage picture.

**Activity: Completing the Image**

Note: This is a silent activity.

1. Have two students stand up and shake hands. Have them freeze in that pose.
2. Ask the rest of the class what they see in that pose. Who do they think the characters are? What is their relationship to one another? How do they feel about each other? What happened right before this moment? What do you think will happen right after?
3. Now have them break the pose. One of them will join the audience. A new volunteer will strike a pose with the remaining student. They do not have to be touching each other. Continue to discuss the images and swap out volunteers.

**Closing: Discussion**

1. Discuss how each of these activities required ensemble work.
2. Find an example from one of your activities in which the actions of one individual directly influenced the reaction of another individual.
3. What were the difficulties in working together? What were the advantages of working together?
4. What purpose would these activities have in the beginning of the rehearsal process in terms of working with an ensemble? Can you think of activities that are used to promote team work in areas other than art, such as a sports team?
5. Discuss what is needed to make an ensemble function at its best.

**Closing: Homework**

After seeing a production, write a paper on one of the following topics:

- Ensemble pieces often have at least two or more people on the stage at once. Note the configurations of the actors in a few key scenes. Is there significance in their blocking? (For example, do the actors form a triangle on stage because there is a ‘love triangle’ in the play? Is there a circle of performers to represent unity or connected-ness?) Look at the stage picture. Is it balanced? Off balance? How does the staging tie into the director’s concept of the production, or the theme of the play?
- Theatre is a collaborative art, not just the ensemble on stage, but many people offstage. Research all of the artists and staff who work together to put a production on. How do each of their jobs differ? How do they work together?

# Group Objective

## Master Class: *Ensemble Work*

### State Goals Addressed:

Language Arts: 3A, 3B

Fine Arts Drama: 25A, 26A

### Objectives:

- Discover the two basic tools of an actor, his/her voice and body
- Adjust reading rate to react to cues and establish rhythm
- Adjust reading rate to establish relationships, mood, and tone

### Vocabulary Used in this Lesson:

*characters, cue, focus, gesture, mood, movement, objective, rhythm, tone, voice*

**Prerequisite:** None

**Materials Needed:** Play text

### Warm-up Activity: *Mirror Exercises*

Note: There is a silent and a speaking version of this warm-up.

1. Have your students get into pairs.
2. Have them face each other.
3. One person will be the *leader*, the other the *follower*.
4. The leader will slowly make a movement (for example, wave his/her hand, turn his/her head) The follower will do his/her best to imitate the leader's movements.
5. There is no talking in this activity, so the leaders must make their movements and gestures fluid and slow so that the followers can try to anticipate the movement.
6. Have the partners switch roles so that each has a turn as leader and follower.
7. You can try a vocal variation of this exercise; the leader will speak slowly, almost syllable by syllable; the follower will try to say the words along with the leader.

### Warm-up: *Team Work*

1. Have your students get into groups of 3 or more.
2. Have them think of an object that is so big it would take all of their help to move it (for example a piano, couch, or car).
3. Have them "move" this imaginary object. Remind them to focus on what each of them needs to do in order to move this object.
4. Now have each group think of an activity that would require input from each of them (for example, a factory line, doctors in surgery, building a structure).
5. Once each group has run through its activity, perform yours for the rest of the class. See if the class can guess what your group is doing.

### Main Activity: *Machine*

1. Ask for one volunteer to start the machine. That person will stand in the playing space and make a precise motion with a distinct rhythm (for example, he/she may lift his/her arm and turn left twice, and repeat).
2. While the first person continues this action, have your other students join in one by one. Their movement should build off of the movements before it, creating a machine.
3. Depending on the size of your room, you may want to limit the machine to 10 students.
4. After the machine is complete, have the rest of your students decide what they think the machine is used for.
5. You can also do this activity with vocal sounds added to the movements.

**Closing: Discussion:**

1. Describe the focus needed to anticipate both the physical and vocal actions of your partner. Was one harder to follow than the other?
2. Discuss how an actor uses both his/her body and voice in performance.
3. In a production, actors often do not need to say each others' lines at the same time, but in order to keep with the rhythm of the play, often an actor will need to pick up on a cue quickly. Discuss how a focus exercise like this might be helpful.
4. Discuss how the rhythm in a scene can allude to the tone, mood, tension, and relationship between the characters.

**Closing: Homework**

1. Pick a scene from a play that you are reading. Read it aloud with a friend. Read it through three times, adjusting speed, tone, and volume.
2. Write a paragraph about how you would direct this scene. What would the rhythm be like? Are the characters listening to each other? Are they jumping on each others' lines? Are there long pauses between the lines? Explain your direction.

# Storytelling: Telling a story together

## Master Class: *Ensemble Work*

### State Goals Addressed:

**Language Arts: 1A, 1C, 2A, 4C**

**Fine Arts Drama: 25A, 26A, 26B**

### Objectives:

- Adjust reading rate
- Distinguish between main idea and supporting details
- Work as a group to create an original story
- Use pictures to identify exposition, rising action, climax, and falling action

### Vocabulary Used in this Lesson:

*climax, denouement, falling action, rising action, stage pictures*

**Prerequisite:** Complete reading a play

**Materials Needed:** Play text

### Warm-up Activity: *Text Work*

1. Have the class sit in a circle with their scripts in hand.
2. Have a student begin to read a part aloud. Once that line or speech is finished, the person sitting next to him/her will read the next line.
3. Once the students are comfortable reading, have the reader stop at any give point (it does not have to be the end of the speech). The next person will pick up with the reading as quickly as possible.

### Warm-up: *Building a Story*

1. Have your students get into groups of 4 or 5.
2. Again, sit in a circle.
3. One student will begin a story. Each student will then add to the story around the circle. As a group, they will decide when it is done. (They can run this activity a couple of times if they need to get their imaginations going with the story creation.)
4. Have the group summarize their story and give it a title.

### Main Activity: *3 to 5*

1. In the same groups, have the students decide the beginning, middle, and end of their story.
2. For each of these three parts, have them think of an image that captures the moment. The group will create this image themselves as statues or a photograph.
3. Silently, show the three images in a row to the other groups. See if they can guess what your story is about.
4. Now, think about your story in terms of 5 images, one representing each of the following: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement.
5. Stage these five images first within your group, and then for the class.

### Closing: *Discussion*

1. Working with your groups, was it difficult to decide upon three images to represent your story? Did your story have a distinct beginning, middle, and end. Was it difficult to break the story down into 5 images? Was your original story fleshed out enough to create the 5 images? How did the image activity change how you might create a story in the future?
2. As an audience member, was it easier to discern the story with 3 images or 5? What did you learn from the first 3 images? What new insights did you get from the 5 images?

### Closing: *Homework*

1. Using the attached form, outline the play both in terms of beginning, middle, and end, and the 5 structural elements. Write a description of each, and a sketch of the image. Make sure to note what characters are in the picture and where they are.

**Description**

**Image**

**Beginning**

**Middle**

**End**

**Description**

**Image**

**Exposition**

**Rising Action**

**Climax**

**Falling Action**

**Denouement**