The Goodman Theatre
Student Subscription Series
2003-2004 Season

Student Guide

Crows

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Regina Taylor

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Regina Taylor has been a Goodman Artistic Associate since 1994. She premiered her production of *Drowning Crow* at the Goodman and it is now appearing at the Manhattan Theatre Club on Broadway. Her other credits at the Goodman Theatre include: *The Ties that Bind* (playwright), *Oo-Blá-Dee* (playwright), *Millennium Mambo* (actor), *Escape from Paradise* (a one-woman show performed and written by Taylor), and *Transformations* (director). Her other credits as a playwright include: *Urban Zulu Mambo*, *Jenine’s Diary*, *Watermelon Rinds*, *Inside the Belly of the Beast*, *Night in Tunisia*, *Mudtracks*, *Between the Lines*, and *Behind Every Good Man*. Ms. Taylor’s acting credits include Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* on Broadway, Celia in *As You Like It*, and a Witch in *Macbeth*. Off-Broadway she appeared in *Machinal; Map of the World; The Illusion*; Ariel in *The Tempest*, for which she won a Dramalogue Award, and *Jar the Floor* at Second Stage. Her film acting credits include *Clockers*, *Losing Isaiah*, *Lean on Me*, *A Family Thing*, *Courage Under Fire* with Denzel Washington, and *The Negotiator* with Samuel L. Jackson. For her role as Lilly Harper on television series “I’ll Fly Away”, she won a NAACP Image Award and a Golden Globe Award for Best Leading Dramatic Actress, and she was nominated for an Emmy Award. Her additional television credits include “The Education of Max Bickford,” “FEDS,” “Law and Order,” “Crisis at Central High,” “Howard Beach Story,” “Children of Dust,” “Cora Unashamed,” and “Strange Justice.” Her directing credits also include: *Crows* (also directed at the Alliance and Arena theatres). She is currently working on an adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* for the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta.

*Crows* has been at a number of different theatres before arriving at the Goodman:

- Regina Taylor directed the premiere production of *Crows* at the McCarter Theatre in 2002.
- Regina Taylor directed the production at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia, in October of 2003.
- *Crows* was directed in December of 2003 at The Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., by Regina Taylor. By popular demand it will return to the Arena Stage this summer.
- Timothy Bond directed *Crows* in January 2004 at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**Oo-Blá-Dee**

*Oo-Blá-Dee* is the story of a band of female musicians in 1946, and a young woman’s search for her identity and for her voice. It is drawn from the overlooked stories of female jazz bands of the 1930s and the 1940s, and popular figures such as Bette Davis in *Now, Voyager*.

**Drowning Crow**

*Drowning Crow* is a modern African American retelling of the classic Anton Chekhov play *The Seagull*. It is set on an island off the coast of Georgia, and follows the trials of Constantine-Trip (C-Trip), a young performance artist. The language utilized by C-Trip throughout the play is in the form of slam poetry.
# Vocabulary

The following vocabulary words are found in the play. Find definitions for each.

## Religious Terms:
- anointed
- baptism
- Bible
- congregation
- Holy Trinity Pentecostal Church of God
- Holy Spirit
- National Prayer Woman
- pastor
- pews
- prayer service
- preacher
- processional
- Zion

## Ideas:
- accentuates
- annual
- antique
- appearance
- chivalry
- commune
- conceal
- configuration
- cultural identity
- desegregation
- dress code
- fragile
- generations
- “hattitude”
- heirlooms
- intrigue
- jumping the broom
- kingdom
- materialism
- modest
- motif
- mourning
- picketing
- possess
- previous
- prologue
- projected
- sacrifice
- sanctified
- seamstress
- segregation
- self-identify
- serene
- slavery
- sorrow
- tradition

## Music:
- Hip Hop
- Blues
- Jazz
- Reggae
- ring shout
- Rock
- Ska
- skat
- Spirituals

## Hats:
- adorn
- bandana scarf
- headrags
- pill box hats
- top hats
- turbans
- wide brim hats

## References/Words/Places
- Africa
- ancestors
- Andy Gump
- Atlanta
- Bennett College
- butter beans
- Brooklyn, New York
- console
- Gansta
- garment
- geles
- Gibraltar
- glaucoma
- Greensboro
- Kalamazoo
- John F. Kennedy
- Dr. Martin Luther King
- manual sewing machine
- okra
- Spelman
- South Carolina
- Thalhimers (South Carolina Department Store)
- tithes
- voodoo
- WEAL
- wigs
- Woolworths
- Wu Wear
OnStage Worksheet

Read the articles from the OnStage newsletter provided in the back of this guide and answer the following questions.

1. What is the play with music, Crowns, adapted from?

2. What did Taylor feel about the stories and photographs from the women of Crowns?

3. Why are hats important to Jeanette Lewis?

4. For Lewis, what is the connection between religion and hats?

5. What was happening when Alma Adams was asked to remove her hat?

6. Describe the hat that Sanclary Saunders likes to wear.

7. Describe the artistic process of creating the hats for Crowns.

8. Who are the costume designers that helped create the hats for Crowns?

9. When you see Crowns, look for hats based on the renderings, preliminary drawings, which you see on page 9 of Onstage. Were you able to recognize the hats? How were they different/similar to the renderings?

10. In the OnStage article on page 9, there are examples of renderings of hats. Using the vocabulary from “Parts of a Hat” (aigrette, brim, capeline, cloche, cockade, felt, fishtail, pile, tulle, raffia), examine the renderings and decide where these parts are located on these hats.
History: Three Generations

*Crowns* introduces the audience to different generations of African American women. The women’s stories span a hundred-year time period. Mother Shaw has vivid lessons of life from the 1930s. Mabel passionately speaks about the turbulent 1960s. Yolanda creates poetry about her life as a modern urban youth. The histories of past generations help to shape future generations. Each character has an identity, but sometimes the stories of their lives overlap into the same periods in time. Let’s take a look at important history of these characters and what was happening to other African Americans during their lifetimes.

**Mother Shaw**

*Mother Shaw has a very rich and long life. When she was a child she lived in a small home with newspaper wallpaper and her seven brothers and sisters.*

*What was happening in the world when Mother Shaw was a child?*

1905 Madame C.J. Walker develops a method for straightening curly hair, on her way to becoming the first black female millionaire in the United States.

1910 When Mother Shaw was a child the value of $1 would be worth $20 today.

1914 George Washington Carver makes significant scientific advancement in crops such as peanuts and potatoes.

*When Mother Shaw was a young adult movies were black and white, and silent. You could buy a pizza for fifty cents and being a flapper was the rage. What else was going on?*

1920 Marcus Garvey, black civil rights leader, addresses 250,000 African Americans in New York City.

1922 Louis Armstrong, an African American and one of the finest trumpet players in the world, plays the Chicago jazz scene.

1923 Harlem Renaissance (explosion of African American art, music, literature) in New York City.

1924 Spelman College is opened for African American women. *This is where Mabel later attends college.*

1936 Jesse Owens wins track and field medals at the Berlin Olympics under Nazi oppression.

1941 Tuskegee Airmen, first airforce squadron made up of black fighter pilots, fly during World War II.

1947 Jackie Robinson integrates baseball by becoming a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers.

*In the 1950s, Mother Shaw would have liked the freedom to shop at the local department store called Montaldo’s. In the 1960s, when segregation was outlawed, she was able to enter the once “Whites Only” store with pride to purchase a pretty church hat.*
Mabel

Mabel grew up in the period from the 1940s through the 1960s. Americans had survived the Depression, World I, and faced World II. One dollar in 1940 would be worth $13.30 today. In the forties movies were bathed in Technicolor and swing was the new dance and music of the age.

When Mabel was little, her mother created hats on her manual sewing machine.

1954 On May 17 the U.S. Supreme Court rules unanimously in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka that racial segregation in public schools violates the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

1955 A 14-year-old African American Chicago youth, Emmett Till, is lynched in Mississippi.

1955 Rosa Parks boycotts segregation by refusing to give up her seat on a segregated Montgomery bus.

1958 Mabel attended Spelman, the African American women’s college which had a very strict dress code of gloves, stockings, high heeled shoes, and a hat. During the Civil Rights Movement the students took off their hats when they were picketing for desegregation at Woolworths and other “whites only” lunch counters in the south.

1960 In Greensboro, North Carolina a group of college students protest segregation by refusing to move from a “whites only” lunch counter.

1963 During the prime of the Civil Rights Movement, the March on Washington converges and Martin Luther King delivers his “I Have a Dream” speech to thousands of marchers.

1963 Malcolm X forms the Nation of Islam

Yolanda

During the late 1980s and 1990s, Yolanda would wildly run around the streets of New York with her brother. She was a street smart individual who moved to South Carolina after her brother was fatally shot on the streets of Brooklyn.

1983 Harold Washington becomes the first black mayor for the city of Chicago.

1985 One of the most popular shows on television is The Cosby Show.

1992 Riots break out in Los Angeles, sparked by the acquittal of four white police officers caught on videotape beating Rodney King, a black motorist.

1996 Michael Jordan leads the Chicago Bulls to their 5th NBA Championship victory.

2001 Dr. Condoleezza Rice is appointed National Security Advisor for President George W. Bush’s cabinet.

During this time, Yolanda maintains her identity and love for her urban hats She realizes the importance of history, identity, and culture for African American females like herself.

Activity: What was happening in the world?

- Interview an older family member such as a Grandmother, Grandfather, Great Aunt, or Great Uncle. Ask them about what was happening in the world when they were younger. What was important in their lives? How are things different today from when they were growing up?
- Next, think about what important events have happened to you in your life and in the world. How has history affected your life?
- Take some notes from your interview and your brainstorming. Compare what you have found. What are the similarities and differences between what your experiences and the older generation’s experiences.
Hats

Pre-historic man wore hats for protection against snow, rain, sun, and an occasional saber tooth tiger. The tradition continued with the rise of Egypt, the Greek Hellenic age, and the great Roman Empire. The reasoning behind wearing a hat evolved to show high status in society rather than solely for protection. In the 1900s, women were required to wear hats socially. In the 1930s, the film industry influenced women to wear glamorous hats like the movie stars. In the 1950s, with the birth of the American dream, women would wear feminine hats with lots of flowers and fabrics.

Hat Etiquette from Miss Manners and Emily Post:

- “Hat-wearers must be careful when putting something on the hatband…Anything put on the band of a man’s hat must be on the left side, and anything on a woman’s hatband must be on the right.”
- “Women should keep their hats on in homes holding christenings, weddings and funerals, because in those occasions the house is treated as if it were a house of worship.”
- “A gentleman must take off his hat when a woman enters an elevator in an apartment building or a hotel, as those are considered dwellings. He puts it on again in the hall, because a public corridor is like a street. In public buildings, however, the elevator is also considered public, and the hat can stay on.”
- “Men tip or lift their hat only to strangers, not to friends, although a man would lift the hat if he encountered his wife. A hat also is tipped to a woman when passing in a narrow space or when the man speaks to her. If a man runs into a female acquaintance, he must take his hat off when talking to her, but can put it back on if they start walking.”

Items/Process needed to make a Hat:
1. Fulling – tumbling and pounding of cloth in hot water to create felting.
2. Bowing – mechanical separation and layering of wool fibers for the hat.
3. Block – A rigid form to shape a hat made out of wood.
4. Leuring Lathe – a turntable with block to support a felt hat. The hat is placed on a block and it is polished with a pad to give it shine.
5. Stiffening - solution of glue that stiffens the felt or straw.

Parts of a Hat:
- Aigrette -tuft of feathers, usually stiff, used as hat ornament
- Brim – projecting edge of the hat
- Capeline – roughly shaped crown
- Cloche – hood
- Cockade - a ribbon ornament, usually pleated in some fashion
- Felt - cloth made from wool that is compacted by rolling and pressing with heat and moisture
- Fishtail – ribbon with a decorative v-shape that is cut at the end
- Pile- modern synthetic fabric with napped surface
- Tulle--a netting used as ornament or understructure; not as finely woven as illusion, but finer than net
- Raffia – natural straw from Madagascar used to decorate hats
Black women gathering together to groom and arrange their hair is an ancient tradition that originated in Africa. For long hours, women would meet to comb, twist, oil, and braid hair while sharing news of their families, culture, gossip, and future dreams. This common bond between women has helped preserve the African culture around the world. The styling of hair is an expression of identity, unity, and pride.

In the United States during the 18th and 19th century, enslaved African women would informally congregate to style hair as their ancestors had done. Gathering together was valuable time away from the hardships of daily life; it was a way to remember the motherland of Africa. It gave women a sense of self-esteem, ownership, and identity that was taken away from them with the slavery. Hair designs were so distinct that wanted posters for runaway slaves would include a description of the slave’s hairstyle.

When black men and women were freed from the bonds of slavery, part of this freedom was choice in their clothing. One of the most important aspects of a black woman’s physical identity is her hair. A way of showing pride for this feature is by wearing a beautiful hat. The ‘crown’ is carefully created, chosen, and worn to show pride in her identity and culture.

Why African American women, such as the women in Crowns, wear hats to church?

- Women dress well for church because they want to present their best selves. Dressing up is a form of respect to the service, the congregation, and for their god.
- After 1865, many African American women held jobs in domestic service as maids, nannies, and cooks. They were required to wear uniforms at work. On Sunday, they had the opportunity to make their own choices as to what to wear. Many black women chose to wear fancy hats.
- An African American’s choice in Sunday clothing is a symbol of independence, freedom, and cultural identity. Other cultures have the opportunity to appreciate black arts in beauty with African American fashions.
- It brings together communities with a sense of unity and pride.
- “The church was a place where black women’s moral character, beauty, style was openly recognized and appreciated. At church a black woman could walk down the aisle holding her head up high topped with a fancy and heavily decorated hat and wearing a style that reflected her African American heritage.”
  
  - Annette Lynch from Dress, Gender and Cultural Change

Activity: Where Does Status Fall?

Materials: different hats or images of hats and three pieces of paper; one written with the word “high,” the second “low,” and the last “middle.”

1. Everyone sits in the largest open space.
2. Place these signs in different areas of the classroom.
3. Pull out a hat or a drawing of a hat.
4. Each person decides how he/she feels about what status the hat represents and goes to that status sign.
5. Before showing the next hat, participants may voluntarily talk about the choice they made. How do you expect someone to act wearing the hat? How would they speak? What would they be doing wearing the hat?
6. Show the next hat and continue.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does status mean?
2. What are status symbols?
3. Are people aware of their status? How are they treated?
4. Why does everyone deserve respect?
5. Is a famous person more important than someone who is not?
6. Are people who are attractive more important?
7. Is everyone at a certain popularity level at school?
8. What is the perceived difference in status between the rich and the poor?
9. Is every culture respected at the same status level?
10. Do people at a higher status have control over people with lower status?
11. Do people who are older have higher status than younger people?
**Brimmed Crown**
A hat with a surrounding rim that can be stiff or floppy decorated with ribbons, flowers, and feathers, or just straw. It’s a hat that varies according to the taste of the wearer. The brimmed crown is the most popular hat in *Crowns*.

**Gele (gay-lay)**
A gele is a colorful cloth that is tied around the woman’s head for fashion or for work. The way a woman ties it depends upon her mood. It also is referred to as a head rag.

**Pillbox**
It’s a small round hat without a brim. First Lady Jackie Kennedy made the pillbox extremely popular in the 1960s.

**Turban**
A wrapped hat that fits closely to the heard. A turban is a symbol of devotion in the Muslim and the Sikh religion.

**Derby**
It’s a hat with a stiff, narrow brim that is shaped like a dome and usually made out of felt. They were very popular in the late 1800s.

**Fedora**
A fedora hat is a felt hat that sits very low with a brim. The top of the hat has a crease going down it. The fedora was worn often in Golden Age motion pictures like *Casablanca* and gangster movies.

**Baseball Cap**
The baseball cap is the hat of the United States national pastime. It was created in the 1870s and known as the “Chicago style” cap. Catchers wear their caps backwards, as Yolanda does, to stop the brim from interfering with the protective helmets they are wearing.

**Crown**
A crown is maybe worn by a king or queen and signifies importance or royalty.

**Activity: Creating a Character**
Materials: Various types of hats, images of hats, or your imagination to create a hat.
1. With a partner, agree upon what type of hat you are going to wear for a scene.
2. Use the hat you have, or the one you created for the improvised scene.
3. Based on the hat that you are wearing, decide how your character would walk, talk, and behave.
4. Present a scene based around the character you created.
5. While you and your partner create your scene, ask yourself how your character would interact with the other character. How do you know each other? What brings you together in this scene?
6. Change the hat, or the hat that you imagined, and create an entirely new character and scene.

*Note: Don’t pre-plan where the scene is taking place and what it is about. All you need to plan is who you are and what type of hat you are wearing.*

7. Afterwards, discuss how that hat added to your character. Think about how the costume an actor wears aids in the creation of that character.

**Top Hat**
A very tall hat made out of silk. A top hat is popular for extremely formal occasions.
Storytelling

The women in *Crows* communicate through stories. The characters’ stories tell the audience who they are; the experiences they share in their stories help them understand their identity and their relationships with others in the community. Some people have chosen to tell stories for a specific purpose such as teaching, verbal history, entertainment, healing, or sacred rites. In *Crows*, all of these different reasons to tell a story are important to the characters’ identities. To explore why storytelling is such an essential element to *Crows*, read the information on storytelling and try it yourself.

**Oral Tradition: The spoken relation and preservation, from one generation to the next, of a people’s cultural history and ancestry, often by a storyteller in narrative form.**

**History of Oral Storytelling in the African Culture:**

In Africa, spoken word has always been the most common form of communication between people. About ten years ago, 34% of the total population was literate, and in some countries less than 10%. To remember and to create are pivotal tools of African storytelling. If stories, history, and news could not be transcribed into text, than it was very important to use memories to pass on information. Every time a story is told, the tellers creatively change it to make it their own. In Africa, storytelling is an education for youth about their culture, history, and values. This education often occurs at night in storytelling sessions called “moonlight play.” During these sessions people of all ages join together to sit around a fire and freely share music, songs, and stories. Call - and - response, which is dialogue between the teller and the audience, is very common in African “moonlight pay” telling. This tradition of call – and- response is widely seen in African American gospel music and jazz. In Africa, storytellers are called griots. The griots are teachers, singers, historians, and entertainers. The griot is very similar to the modern day minister in African church services. Ancient African oral storytelling remains a major influence in modern African American music, religion, and in folklore.

**The Personal Narrative**

All the stories told in *Crows* are called personal narratives, which are stories about one’s life, culture, and history. In the African American culture, the wearing of beautiful hats to church is a very important tradition that all the characters in *Crows* create personal narratives about. We all have stories which make each of us unique. It doesn’t matter if the subject of your story seems very simple or complex. If it is a story about something important to you, such as a friend, family member, or event, then it is waiting to be told! Try these activities to spark ideas for your personal narrative.

**Here are some activities to generate ideas for stories:**

**Story of Your Name.**

Think about where your name came from, what it means, what you feel about it, and who gave it to you.

**Story of When You Were Young.**

Think about what life was like when you were younger. Finish the phrase “When I was young…” with what you remember you did when you were young.

**Ritual Objects.**

Tell a story about an object that means a lot to you. For example, in *Crows* everyone has a special hat. What is your important belonging?

“We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed”.

- Peter Brooks
Storytelling Activity

Step 1: Topic
- Do one of the preliminary storytelling exercises: “The Story of Your Name,” “The Story of When you Were Young,” and “Ritual Objects.” These activities will help you brainstorm story ideas.
- Once you have narrowed down the possible stories you would like to tell, answer these questions:
  - Is the potential story important to me?
  - What am I telling my audience?
  - Would my audience enjoy listening to this story?
  - Am I comfortable telling this story?
  - Would my audience be comfortable hearing this story?
If you feel you have positive answers to questions you are ready to roll! The story has chosen you!

Step 2: Taming the Story
- Taming the story means preparing, telling, and working the story so it is ready to be presented to an audience.
- Create simple plot points for your story. You need to decide how your story will begin, where the middle is, and how the story will end.
- Think of the story in terms of images. Movie directors and storytellers use storyboards to build the plots of their movies and stories. Draw a simple picture of each significant plot point in your story. Arrange these drawings in a logical order.
- When you tell the story you think of the pictures you have drawn, rather than words to remember the plot. You don’t need to memorize words, but you need to remember images. However, you should create a good opening sentence that will get your audience’s attention. Also, create a strong and/or clever closing sentence. This is called a button in storytelling. You don’t need to remember anything else.

Step 3: Practice the story!
- Tell the story with the basic plot points and prepared opening/button sentences you created.
- Tell the story again, but when you tell it, think about adding details for the story boards you created earlier. Instead of drawing these details, integrate them into your telling. These details can be vivid language, specific details, and rhythms of the words you are using.
- Tell your story again! This time:
  - Add inflection to the words in your story
  - Add gestures to clarify the plot
  - Add representational sounds (i.e., an alarm clock beeping)
  - Plan to make eye contact with members of your audience to draw in their interest.
- Decide: Your story can be characterized by a lot of movement and variation with voices. It can also be told as if you’re having a conversation with a good friend. Every storyteller has his/her own style – some professional tellers are very animated while some are very conversational in their telling. What kind of teller are you?
- Warning: Find alternatives to portraying stereotypes of gender, age, and cultures. Don’t create stereotypes. A good storyteller realizes the importance of uniqueness in the characters he/she is portraying.
- After you have developed your story, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, and PRACTICE! Tell the story to your family, friends, yourself in the mirror. An audience is essential for telling a story. Before you have to perform in front of the audience try to tell to a practice one.

Step 4: Tell your story to the audience!
Music

In *Crowns* music is an essential element; the various music types help tell and unite the diverse stories. The characters in *Crowns* are connected through culture, gender, and by generations. The stories of the past help create the stories of the future. Various musical styles have built the path of African American music. Music created in Africa traveled to the United States with slavery. Over time, the African musical form transformed into many different musical genres. Read how the various styles relate to each other.

**Gospel Music:** Gospel music originated in West Africa and in the southern United States with enslaved African American populations. The style evolved to work songs, songs slaves sang on the plantations. Gospel music is very joyous compared to spirituals. Call-and-response, a line of the lyrics that is sung and repeated by the congregation, is very important in Gospel music. The songs call for obedience to god, and refraining from sin, and show people’s love for god. The music is performed with enthusiasm, vigor, and spiritual inspiration. As the genre developed it became popular in the entire black community, not just the secular (non-religious). Aretha Franklin vocal interpretation. Another tradition Gospel Music ring shout. The type of African formance in the nation of call-rhythmic dance, is well known for her
tions of Gospel music, that is associated with and the Spiritual is the ring shout is the oldest American dance per-
country. It is a combi-and –response singing, and drum beats.

**Jazz:** Jazz is a collage of spiritual, gospel, work songs, and traditional African music. In the late 19th century, jazz originated in New Orleans, Louisiana. It is characterized as spontaneous, improvisational and highly emotional. Jazz appealed to a wide audience of different races, genders, economic classes, and musical tastes. Duke Ellington was the king of jazz during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

**Spiritual:** The spiritual is considered to be the original form of American folk music. Slaves were brought to the United States from many different cultures in Africa. It is a rhythmic folk song popularly sung at African American Christian church services. They are deeply emotional songs related to passages in the Bible. Spirituals strongly influenced the creation of Jazz and the Blues. They are sad and reflective, which are similar to the emotions that are conveyed in the Blues. Upbeat spiritual songs inspired gospel music. These different cultures influenced spirituals, which developed in North America. Spirituals contain diverse rhythms and call-and-response patterns. Audiences helped boost the amount of spirituals because they were not rehearsed. popular spiritual is Go Marching In.”

**Blues:** The Blues, described as the heart of Jazz, is based on a standardized twelve bar progression of notes. The blues grew out of African spirituals and work songs. In the late 1800s, with the influence of folk, spiritual, and country music, the blues formed. Blues music is characterized by a flat 3rd note and 7th note referred to as the ‘blues notes’. These ‘blues notes’ help create the sad melodic tone. The lyrics in blues songs have an earthy quality and are about the hardships people face such as death, relationships, and poverty. The tempo can be very slow and notes are held for a long period of time. The Blues are about tradition and self-expression. Billie Holiday was a famed Blues singer known for her emotional style.
Music

Reggae: Reggae, which has been influenced by Jazz and the Blues, developed in the 1960s in Jamaica. It is a combination of African American soul music, traditional African and Jamaican folk music, and Ska (a Jamaican and British dance hall music). Reggae is closely connected to the Rastafarian political and religious movement. Some of the common instruments used in Reggae include organ, piano, drums, electric guitar, and electric bass. The music is composed of stringy off-the-beat rhythms. Bob Marley is an original founder of the Reggae movement.

Hip-Hop: Hip-Hop is the culture which developed with the Rap movement 1970s. Both musical forms have roots in the reggae style. Hip-hop applies to culture. Hip-hop includes funk music, free style, versatile performer, embraced the hip-hop culture dance, clothing, language, and the music of the as well as Rap. Queen Latifa, an extremely in the creation of her music.

Rap: Rap originated with African American and Latino performers growing out of the hip-hop culture in New York City during the late 1970s. The music was associated with break dancing. The lyrics of rap are chanted and improvised street poetry (Slam). Tupac Shakur was able to raise the level of artistry of rap music during his lifetime.

Activity: Listen!

1. Go to your library’s music section. Check out a piece of Gospel, Jazz, Reggae, other music from the forms discussed above that you heard in Crowns.
2. Look through your own music collection and find pieces you would like to listen to.
3. Listen to both pieces of music and take some notes while you are listening.
4. Compare the different genres of music. Keep the following questions in mind. What is similar and different in the two pieces from different genres of African American Music? What is the music saying? How has one type of music influenced the sound of the other type? What music do you enjoy listening to that you haven’t heard before? Write down some of your observations.
5. Ask older family members what they listened to when they were young. Do they appreciate music today?

Identify: How are the following people important to the Black musical culture? What style or styles of music did or do they perform?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Louis Armstrong</th>
<th>Marianne Anderson</th>
<th>Buddy Bolden</th>
<th>Count Basie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chuck Berry</td>
<td>Clifford Brown</td>
<td>Ray Charles</td>
<td>Miles Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke Ellington</td>
<td>Jimi Hendrix</td>
<td>Lena Horne</td>
<td>Mahalia Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Joplin</td>
<td>Jelly Roll Morton</td>
<td>Bill Robinson</td>
<td>Nina Simone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bessie Smith</td>
<td>Andre Watts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Slave Narrative

During the centuries of the Atlantic slave trade, two million slaves were brought to the Americas from the Caribbean and West Africa. At first, oral stories were told by slaves about their experiences and were not manually recorded. In order for the same stories to be retold exactly they needed to be written down for future generations to read. The slave narratives were transcribed oral accounts of slavery from the perspective of the enslaved, documenting daily life, culture, and the brutality of slavery. From 1936 to 1938 over 2,300 former slaves were interviewed by writers and journalists from the Works Progressive Administration (WPA). The interviews took place in every area of the south where slavery existed and in areas of the north with runaway slaves antebellum (before the south broke away from the north with the Civil War). The slave narratives are examples of historical primary sources because the writers recorded first hand, eyewitness accounts of slavery. Slave narratives outnumbered novels and biographies written by African Americans. They influenced classic literature such as Uncle Tom’s Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain, and Beloved by Toni Morrison. And, they have created dialogue in postbellum United States between black and white Americans about the realities of slavery.

Here is a selection from the slave narrative Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl written by Harriet Jacobs. Jacobs was a runaway slave who hid in a shed of her grandmother’s house for seven years. Her grandmother was a freed slave and Jacobs’s children were living in the house not yet free.

“The rats and mice ran over my bed; but I was weary, and I slept such sleep as the wretched may, when a tempest had passed over them. Morning came. I knew it by the noises I heard; for in my small den day and night were all the same. I suffered for air even more than for light. But I was comfortless. I heard the voices of my children. There was joy and there was sadness in the sound. It made my tears flow. How I longed to speak to them! I was eager to look on their faces; but there was no hole, no crack, through which I could peep. This continued darkness was oppressive. It seemed horrible to sit and lie in the cramped position day after day, without one gleam of light. Yet I would have chosen this, rather than my lot as a slave, though white people considered it an easy one; and it was compared to the fate others. I was never cruelly overworked; I was never lacerated with the whip from head to foot; I was never so beaten and bruised that I could not turn from one side to the other; I never had my heel strings cut to prevent my running away; I was never chained to a log and forced to drag it about, while I toiled in the fields till morning to night; I was never branded with hot iron, or torn by bloody hounds. On the contrary, I had always been kindly treated, and tenderly cared for, until I came into the hands of Dr. Flint. I had never wished for freedom till then. But though my life in slavery was comparatively devoid of hardships, God pity the woman who is compelled to lead such a life!”

Questions:
1. From this selection, what emotions is Jacob feeling?
2. Why does she mention what she has not been subjected to?
3. Can you think of any other first hand accounts, outside the scope of slave narratives, in which the writer is hiding for protection from what is happening to his/her culture or religion in the world?
4. How does this narrative make you feel about the difficult choices we make in our lives?

Activity: Narrative
Think of an experience that was important to you and create a paragraph in first person about it. Think of the narrative that you have just read. Remember to add details to your narrative.
Poetry

In *Crowns*, Yolanda often speaks in poetic form. Poetry is pivotal to the rhythm, language, and sentiment of the plot. Raw emotions and complex ideas are artistically expressed through poetry. Since the beginning of literature, poetry has been an extremely creative form of communication. It can take on multiple forms and lengths. A poem can be as short as one simple line of words, or continue for pages and pages. Poetry has the ability to inspire a reader into action, allow them to express a feeling, and the poet’s voice is heard through their work. In the African American culture, over the past two centuries there have been many exceptional black poets. Each has an individual style and voice. Let’s take a look at the work of African American poet Ai.

*Conversation*

By Ai
We smile at each other
and I lean back against the wicker couch.
How does it feel to be dead? I say.
You touch my knees with your blue fingers.
And when you open your mouth,
a ball of yellow light falls to the floor
and burns a hole through it.
Don't tell me, I say. I don't want to hear.
Did you ever, you start,
Wear a certain kind of dress
And just by accident,
So inconsequential you barely notice it,
Your fingers graze that dress
And you hear the sound of a knife cutting paper,
You see it too
And you realize how that images
Is simply the extension of another image?
That your own life
Is a chain of words?
That one-day will snap.
Words, you say, young girls in a circle, holding Hands,
And beginning to rise heavenward
In their confirmation dresses,
Like white helium balloons,
The wreaths of flowers on their heads spinning,
And above all that,
That’s where I'm floating,
And that's what it's like
Only ten times clearer,
Ten times more horrible.

*About the Poet*

Ai, a half Japanese, Choctaw-Chickasaw, Black, Irish, Southern Cheyenne, and Camanche poet, was born in 1947 in Texas. Her name means love in Japanese. As with the slave narratives, a majority of Ai’s work is written in the first person, although she creates characters not based upon personal experiences. Much of her work deals with the subject of race and issues that are relevant to women. Some of her anthologies of poetry include: *Cruelty, Killing Floor, Sin, Fate, Greed, and Vice.*

Questions:
1. What images do you remember from “Conversation”? What images do you remember from Yolanda’s first monologue?
2. Who are the speakers in both of the poem and the monologue; what are some of the experiences they have had?
3. What is similar about the form of both poems? What is different?
4. What is the importance of the dress and the references to the color white in “Conversation”?
5. What is the relationship between Yolanda and her brother?
6. What other forms of poetry do you see in *Crowns*?

Poetry Activity: Write your own!
After reading and analyzing “Conversation” and Yolanda’s poem, create your own poem. It does not need to have any set form or rhyme. Write a poem in the first person about an experience that was important to you. Remember the importance of description and details when writing your poem.