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**THE TRINITY RIVER PLAYS**

By REGINA TAYLOR

Directed by ETHAN MCSWEENY

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This study guide is published by Goodman Theatre’s Education and Community Engagement Department for participants in the Student Subscription Series.

For more information related to THE TRINITY RIVER PLAYS, lesson plans and activities, please visit our Education website at:

[http://education.goodmantheatre.org](http://education.goodmantheatre.org)
Introduction to the Study Guide

BY WILLA J. TAYLOR

Regina Taylor’s new trilogy, *Trinity River Plays*, speaks to me in a very different way from most of the audiences that will see it. I grew up in Dallas and the Trinity River – and the cicadas – is a part of my history as well.

The plays take place in South Oak Cliff, an unincorporated community across the overpass from my childhood neighborhood of South Dallas. When I was growing up, Dallas was very segregated, both by law and by custom. There were stores downtown we couldn’t shop in, restaurants and lunch rooms where we couldn’t eat, and neighborhoods where you couldn’t live. As a kid, my entire world spanned the 40-something blocks of South Dallas, an enclave defined by the State Fair grounds on one side and a highway on the other. But within that community was the wealth of the world. Dr. Smith, my dentist (who pulled each of my baby teeth and then gave me candy), lived three blocks from my grandmother, with his office in a converted mansion on Forrest Ave., the main thoroughfare in South Dallas. Dr. Conrad, my pediatrician, lived just across the street from my elementary school, half a block away from my house. Red Garland, the great jazz pianist, and his parents lived across the street from us. My dream was to get out of Wheatley Elementary and ride my bike three blocks to James Madison High School, home of the Mighty Trojans! It was where all my cousins – who lived within blocks of me – had gone and distinguished themselves. I wanted to continue the tradition.

When I got to the 8th grade, my best friend Cecile and her parents, Dr and Mrs. Conrad, decided to be a test case for neighborhood integration and they packed up their belongings and moved to South Oak Cliff. They were the first black family on that side of the overpass, and it was not an easy transition. Rocks were thrown through their windows; none of their new neighbors would speak to them. Cecile’s mom brought her back to South Dallas for school, fearing violence.

They stayed. They fought. They were pioneers. And gradually, with white flight and less onerous conditions more African Americans moved to Oak Cliff and the community became diverse. It was not easy, but without their bravery and willingness to put their own safety on the line, change would not have come to Dallas.

I got to go to Madison, but in my senior year of high school the hard-fought struggle to eradicate “separate but equal” in the city finally paid off. Public accommodations (including housing, transportation and schools) were integrated by law. For me it was bittersweet. I had sat-in at the Woolworth’s lunch counter with my Nana and had walked the picket lines with my dad. I knew what this victory meant, not just for me but for the city. No more second-class citizenship. More and better opportunities. But I had not realized what it would mean to me personally.

That August, my parents transferred me from Madison to the newly-built Skyline High School to be part of the inaugural senior class. Students from all over the city were bussed to Skyline and the 1200 students in my class were as diverse as the United Nations. It opened a new world to me and introduced me to customs and foods and music I had only read about. Now I had friends who were black, Mexican, Chinese, Korean, Puerto Rican, and white.

I graduated from Skyline and left Dallas for good.

South Dallas and South Oak Cliff are now mere shells of what they were when I was a kid. Poverty, joblessness, drugs have decimated the communities. The city built highways to cut them off, and renewal-development projects promised have never arrived. But in my heart, I will always remember swimming in Dr. Conrad’s pool, the only African Americans in a sea of other.
The Trinity River Plays is a script of epic proportions, lasting over 3 hours and filling over 185 pages. It makes sense, then, that the set must be similarly epic. In viewing The Trinity River Plays stage, you’ll notice the detail and thought which went into the set. The tree, for example, required tens of thousands of individual leaves (over 16,500)! The food you see on stage is real, meaning props crews collected hundreds of catfish fillets, eggs, boxes of cakes mix, and bottles of Dr.Pepper. Not only is the food real, but food is even cooked on stage, meaning crews not only attend to grocery shopping on a regular basis, but they built a set capable of live cooking! If that weren’t enough, there is rain on stage. In addition to the middle play, Rain, there is actual water raining down on the Spears’ home!

Set designer, Todd Rosenthal, is known for these larger than life stage creations. He has made a number of beautiful sets nation wide. The Goodman’s state of the art theatre center has the space, staff and resources for such productions, “Broadway sized,” productions - but it is not Broadway. Indeed, a number of non for profit theatres in the US are similarly able to stage “Broadway sized,” productions despite not being on Broadway - but how? The answer, increasingly, is “enhancement money.” Enhancement money is becoming more common in the funding of non for profit and regional theatre productions nationwide. Journalist Campbell Roberston defines enhancement deals in his article, “Nonprofit Show, but Money’s Riding On It.”

“An enhancement deal, conventionally, is when a commercial producer pays money to a nonprofit theater to help subsidize a production. If a theater decides to stage a big musical, for example, a commercial producer may throw in a few hundred thousand dollars — or a couple million in some cases — to raise the show’s production values and get a sense of how it would look in a bigger theater.

For most participants the deal is a no-brainer. In exchange for the money (which can be tax deductible) the commercial producer gets a research and development lab for the show and the rights to transfer it elsewhere. The theater gets a bigger show and a better chance that it will transfer to a commercial run — and, if everyone is lucky and the show hits, a steady flow of royalties.”

Enhancement deals have been common for decades, but are often kept hush-hush because the nature of a non for profit organization taking thousands or millions of dollars from a commercial company just sounds strange. These deals are common place, perfectly normal, and perfectly legal, but still sound seedy when explained aloud. Furthermore, taking enhancement money means being attached to the commercial producers who gave it, whether for good or bad. The wildly popular musical Rent, started as an off-off Broadway production at the New York City Theatre Workshop, supported by enhancement money. Following its commercial success, New York City Theatre Workshop received money in royalties, helping it create more works, some of which may loose money as they are not commercially viable. Without these royalties, a theatre may not have the funds to take risks on new works in the future. Despite the benefits
these royalties provide, New York City Theatre Workshop Artistic Director, James Nicola, went on the record with the New York Times saying he regretted taking the enhancement money, “Enhancement, he said, causes the specter of a commercial transfer to hover over the artistic process. ‘It just pollutes the atmosphere, distorts it,’ he said,” (Roberston, 2007).

Transfer shoes differ from commercial traveling shows, in that they begin in a playhouse and may not have a promise to be moved, or only have a definite transfer to one other playhouse. *The Trinity River Plays*, for example, opened at the Dallas Theatre Center with knowledge they would be moved to Chicago, but they do not have a definite arrangement to move immediately to another theatre. A show like *Wicked*, by comparison, is considered a travelling show because it is promised to travel the nation from a Broadway house - the tour is built into subsequent productions of this already successful musical.

Of course, the enhancement system is not all good or bad. As corporate and government funding for the arts has dropped drastically over the decades, enhancement money has become a staple in crafting productions. Some theatres have felt the pain of enhancement heavy seasons since the late 2000s, when the recession economy led to a decrease in all available funds, including enhancement money. For those theatres dependant on enhancement cash, lack of it has equaled the end of the company itself. Many theatres, however, use enhancement money in conjunction with earned and donor driven funding. These theatres are able to survive without particularly large or frequent enhancement support, while potentially benefiting from the occasional enhancement deal. Some theatres avoid enhancement money altogether, preferring to keep the artistic integrity of the show completely in house.

While commercial funds may sound stickier, donor raised funds can come with strings attached as well - to assume a non-enhancement money play is any more “pure,” would be unfair. Regardless of how much enhancement money a theatre takes, having a strong willed, clear visioned, artistic director is key. Pulitzer prize winning playwright Paula Vogel, explained it very well to the New York Times, “... there [is] no way around the system for most theaters, given the financial landscape. As long as artistic directors are vigilant about controlling the process... the presence of commercial money probably does little harm,” (Roberston, 2007).
Todd Rosenthal: Master of the Scenic Arts

BY WILLIAM LANDON

As you watch the magic unfold on The Albert’s stage, you may forget that the tiny electric world of The Trinity River Plays (TRP) before you was once a design on the desk of an artist. TRP’s scenic designer Todd Rosenthal is a Chicago-based designer working in opera and live theater who has occasionally ventured into commercial contracts with resorts and restaurants. From the epic and imaginative scope of his stage work, however, it is clear that his true artistic home is the theater.

Rosenthal is a native of Longmeadow, Massachusetts. He graduated with a degree in English and theater from Colgate University and earned his masters in set/lighting design at the Yale School of Drama on a prestigious scenic design scholarship. He has worked nationally and has gained some international fame from tours of his productions. He is perhaps best known from his designs for Steppenwolf Theatre’s August: Osage County, in which he explored the gothic and the whimsical. His work on this production earned him the 2008 Tony Award for Scenic Design—one of the greatest awards a theater professional can hope to receive. He has designed for theaters in Chicago, Washington D.C., New York City, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Baltimore, San Jose, Houston, Dallas, London and others. He has earned various international awards for his work, including the Lawrence Olivier Award and a space at the U.S. exhibition at the 2007 Prague Quadrennial Exhibit of Theatre Design in the Czech Republic.

Even accomplished theater artists sometimes doubt themselves, and a design like TRP began with a series of ideas—and probably not all of them hit the mark. In a 2008 interview conducted by Laura Lynn MacDonald, literary assistant for the Milwaukee Rep, Rosenthal emphasized that all his work starts with a dream: “As a designer, you have to start somewhere. I tell my students, if you think something’s dreadful, bring that in—it’s useful, because now you know what your set isn’t. It’s like Edison who tried 2,000 ways to make a light bulb and was left with 2,000 ways NOT to make a light bulb. I think of lots of crappy ideas, but eventually they lead to something that’s decent. I no longer go home at night thinking, ‘God, I got nothing done today!’ Because I probably got a lot done, even if it was just daydreams and pondering. I now know that the really, really, really bad idea ultimately leads to the better idea. Like manure to fertilizer!”

You can find out more about Mr. Rosenthal online at: http://www.toddar.com/clients/roshentalt/nav/splash.shtml
The following essay by Regina Taylor gives readers insight into her mother’s enduring strength and perseverance as a woman and a mother, and throughout her four year fight against ovarian cancer.

“Things My Mother Taught Me”
Written by Regina Taylor

An only child, there was rarely a week that would go by when I didn’t talk to my mother. In a routine conversation, she asked me to come visit. She didn’t tell me why, and she didn’t need a reason. I thought that it had been too long since my last visit at the beginning of the year.

I got on a plane the next day from New York to Dallas. When I got home, everything looked the same. My mother was out in her garden as she was everyday – religiously. She casually mentioned that she had gotten some tests from her GYN, and they wanted her to come in for the results. She had never asked me to come with her to a doctor’s appointment. She didn’t want to talk about it, and she looked like her regular self: Strong. The sign on the doctor’s door read “Oncologist,” and my heart started racing. I asked her why we were at an oncologist’s office. Don’t they treat cancer? She said simply that her tests had been sent here.

We sat down at the doctor’s desk. He calmly explained that yes, my mother had cervical cancer. He said it was late Stage Four. He said she had six months to live. My mother, Leannell Taylor, was born to sharecroppers who worked the fields with her seven siblings in Mexia, Texas. They later moved to Big D, where they worked downtown at one of Dallas’ finest hotels of the day, The Adolphus. They lived in the West Dallas Projects – where Bonnie and Clyde had roamed. They would go back to Mexia and work in the fields in the summer to earn extra money for school supplies.

My mother graduated from high school Summa cum laude. She worked at a rag factory to put herself through Wiley College. I was born before she graduated. One of my earliest memories was proudly watching her walk at graduation. She became an English teacher before she became one of the first African-Americans to integrate the regional Social Security Administration offices in Oklahoma and Texas.

My mother was a pillar of her family and community, a
no-nonsense, God-fearing woman.

For a year, she had ignored the signs – bloating, difficult menstrual cycles, headaches, sleeplessness nights, changes in the urgency and frequency to urinate. And she told no one, hoping that she could move through this without help, as she had moved through so many things in her life.

We asked for a second opinion. The second doctor at Baylor Hospital corrected the diagnosis to ovarian cancer – still late Stage Four, but this doctor humbly refused to give a time limit to a woman who refused to accept limits on her life.

My mother fought a brilliant four-year battle, filled with living and loving.

I moved back to Dallas and had the privilege to witness this test of faith and witness the tenaciousness of her spirit. In that four years time, she taught me to garden. She taught me about the garden’s cycles and its mysteries. What my mother passed down to me is about the tests that life gives us – and how we make it through those tests. Like a hard rain in her garden, it can beat you down, but it also gives you the opportunity to take sustenance from the experience to grow stronger – and to transform.

Please visit www.ovariancancerawareness.org. Save a life.
I’ve always rooted my work in the idea of looking at the condition of the human spirit. That’s a constant throughout my plays, and it carries over into The Trinity River Plays. When writing this play, it became about writing the life of this woman, Iris Spears, who goes through different transformations—17-year transformations. The first piece is Jar Fly, which is another name for cicada, an insect that has a transformation in its 17th year—it lives underground as a grubby worm before it climbs up a tree on its 17th birthday, waiting for the light of day to hit it, and then it spreads its wings. We first see Iris on the day she becomes 17. She is a budding writer trying to find her own voice, and she is in the process of becoming when an incident that happens (on this day) that changes the course of her life. She loses her innocence and looks out at the world as a grown woman. We see her next when she’s 34 years old, and then she goes through another major life transformation from there. So the piece deals with these transformative moments in this woman’s life.

LG: Can you describe how Iris’ relationship with her mother affects her transformations?

RT: Rain centers on the mother/daughter relationships in these plays. In Rain, Iris returns to Dallas after hearing bad news about her mother’s health.

The mother/daughter relationships in this play are very passionate. These are root relationships—where you come from defines who you are. Rain is about returning to the soil that has named you, as well as the person who names you. Iris struggles with her identity as she and her mother face the hard rain in their lives. And how we face the hard rain in our lives is very telling. Some people try to outrun it; others stand their ground to take sustenance from it to grow. The moments in life that threaten to uproot us; these moments of uncertainty can be points of growth.
In *Ghoststory*, Iris wrestles with and embraces her history/past/ghosts. The central question is, which way do you go to move forward? We’re always circling back in life, as in the cycles of a garden.

**LG: What has it been like for you to see these characters come to life through this cast, in rehearsal?**

RT: When [director Ethan McSweeny and I] were casting these plays, we were both looking for actors who could completely inhabit the characters. It’s a wonderful cast—such a great group of people. And I’m very excited about these strong, complex characters coming to life through this cast and on the stage. I hope that through them audiences will come and be able to see themselves, that they will look at how life affects them, and how they affect life.

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**Regina Taylor: Actress, Director and Playwright**

*By Goodman Theatre and Teresa Rende*

Ms. Taylor’s most recent play, *Magnolia*, an adaptation of Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*, was produced at the Goodman in 2009, under the direction of Anna D. Shapiro. Her play *The Dreams of Sarah Breedlove* premiered at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and was produced at the Goodman in June 2006 with Ms. Taylor directing. *Drowning Crow*, her adaptation of Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, premiered at Goodman Theatre, and was produced on Broadway at Manhattan Theatre Club’s Biltmore Theatre. Ms. Taylor wrote the award-winning *Crowns*, which was first produced at McCarter Theatre Center and at Second Stage in New York, and has gone on to become one of the most often performed musicals in America; she also directed the production to critical acclaim. Ms. Taylor’s other plays include *Oo-Blá-Dee*, which premiered at the Goodman and won the 2000 American Theatre Critics/Steinberg New Play Award; *Escape From Paradise*, a one-woman show; *Watermelon Rinds; Inside the Belly of the Beast; Mudtracks; Love Poem #97*; and she curated *Millennium Mambo* (aka *Urban Zulu Mambo*), an evening of short plays by Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, Suzan-Lori Parks and Kia Corthron.

Ms. Taylor’s acting credits include roles on Broadway, off Broadway and in numerous regional theaters. Her film credits include *Clockers, Lean on Me, Courage Under Fire* with Denzel Washington and *The Negotiator* with Samuel L. Jackson. For her role as Lilly Harper on the television series *I’ll Fly Away*, Ms. Taylor won an NAACP Image Award, was nominated for an Emmy Award and received the Golden Globe Award for Best Leading Dramatic Actress. She appeared as Cora in *Cora Unashamed* in PBS’ Masterpiece Theatre American Collection.

Additional television credits include the CBS series *The Education of Max Bickford, Crisis at Central High, Children of the Dust* with Sidney Poitier and *Strange Justice*, a Showtime original film in which she portrayed Anita Hill (Peabody Award, Gracie Award). Ms. Taylor played Molly Blane on CBS’ *The Unit*, written and produced by David Mamet and Shawn Ryan (2008 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Actress in a Drama).

Ms. Taylor is also the spokeswoman for Ovarian Cancer Symptom Awareness, an organization whose message you can read and promote by visiting www.ovariancancersymptomawareness.org

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You can find more about Ms. Taylor online at www.reginataylor.com or http://education.goomantheatre.org.
Count on Hours Well Spent with ‘The Trinity River Plays’:
Director Ethan McSweeny
REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION BY AUTHOR LAWSON TAITTE AND THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Director Ethan McSweeny signed on to stage an intimate 80-minute show, Rain, for his Dallas Theater Center debut. By the time Regina Taylor’s world premiere opened on Friday, it had grown into The Trinity River Plays, three related dramas lasting three hours and 20 minutes.

“As soon as we heard them, we knew we should do them all,” says director Ethan McSweeny of Regina Taylor’s plays.

Not that McSweeny is complaining. He admits to a taste for long-form theater, which he compares to “coming in for a full meal.” He boldly compares The Trinity River Plays to works by one of the greatest American playwrights, Eugene O’Neill, who often turned out massive scripts.

“It’s a little scary to do a three-hour-plus play, but the first audiences have loved it. They’re even staying for the talkbacks afterward,” the director says. “It’s a little like buying a DVD set, when you dive in and watch a bunch of episodes in a row. Over 18 years, you really get into the lives of these people – and they’re such wonderful characters.”

Rain is the central panel in a triptych that begins with Jar Fly and ends with Ghoststory. When McSweeny heard that the playwright was already working on two plays that shared characters with Rain, he wanted to hear them read in sequence, just to see if all the information was tracking from script to script.

“As soon as we heard them, we knew we should do them all,” McSweeny says, “and I said we should do them all on a single bill, not on alternate nights.”

The Trinity River Plays depict episodes in the life of a young black woman from South Oak Cliff named Iris Spears. Over the course of nearly two decades, she matures from a teenager to a successful journalist – and learns how to cope with difficult family situations.

In some ways, the character resembles her author: Taylor grew up in Oak Cliff and went to Southern Methodist University before going on to a major career as an actor and playwright. She starred in a couple of major TV
McSweeny, 39, has directed his share of world premieres as well as classic plays at the top regional theaters in the U.S. The Washington, D.C., native made his Broadway debut before he was 30 with a revival of Gore Vidal’s *The Best Man* that was nominated for a 2001 Tony Award. He’s co-artistic director of the summer-only Chautauqua Theater Company and looks like an obvious contender to run a larger company when the right job opens.

“Ethan at heart is a classicist, with an immense love for the text, which he brings to life as it’s spoken by actors in a really dynamic way,” [Dallas] Theater Center artistic director Kevin Moriarty says. “That has great benefit for Regina’s writing, which in its best moments really sings.” *The Trinity River Plays* represent a first for McSweeny – premiering a new play in the city in which it is set. The river becomes a symbol of a society divided racially and economically.

The director has loose connections with Dallas: A great-grandmother moved here in the 1930s and, according to family legend, had the first charge card ever issued by Neiman Marcus. Still, he didn’t know the city well. The Theater Center got a van and took the cast and director on a tour of the landmarks mentioned in the play.

“Regina was doing some writing and didn’t go along,” McSweeny says. “I think she wanted us to come to it ourselves. A good play is universal, but you have to get the specifics right. There’s a lot of gardening in this play, so it’s fitting to say that its roots run deep in this community.”
Does it really have to end? The world of a book, movie, or play, will always draw to a close. All of the characters have made their respective journeys, the plots have neatly folded, and the bittersweet calm of reality is either a minute’s time or a page’s turn away. The curtain begins to fall. Such is the lifespan of most stories, unless of course, this particular story happens to be the beginning or middle of a trilogy.

**What is a Trilogy?**

There are multiple classic assumptions concerning what creates a trilogy, ranging from a trilogy’s defining characteristics to its most popular medium or form. An easy assumption to make is that a trilogy can be any three separate works sharing the same author. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines a trilogy as “a series of three dramas or literary or musical compositions that, although each is in one sense complete, have a close mutual relation and form one theme or develop aspects of one basic concept.” Thus, more than sharing characters, each distinct section of a trilogy enhances and builds upon an author’s specific theme or key idea.

Another misconception about trilogies is that they primarily exist in the medium of cinema. *Star Wars* may be the first example that comes to mind. This belief also causes trilogies to appear as a relatively new invention. In actuality, trilogies are an ancient medium with roots in Greek drama. *The Oresteia*, a trilogy about a curse on the House of an ancient king, Atreus. It was written by the Greek playwright Aeschylus circa 458 BCE, and is an example of one of the first recorded trilogies. Sophocles, another Greek tragedian, wrote the famous *Oedipus* trilogy, in which an orphaned king fulfilled a prophecy that foretold he would kill his father and marry his mother in order to regain his throne.

Taylor’s *The Trinity River Plays* took years to craft. The final product was born out of readings and workshops in multiple cities. *Rain*, the second play in the trilogy, was actually the first play written and was first read during Goodman’s 2010 New Stages Series. The work then moved on to workshops in New York City, Hartford, Connecticut, and Minneapolis. *Jar Fly* came next, with *Ghoststory* being written last. This out-of-order creation process made staging the production an artistic obstacle. A big question was how the audience would experience the over all production. Should the plays be performed in the order that each was written? Could the audience see one play per night over the course of a few days? Would the essence of the overall work be lost if viewed over consecutive nights? Instead, Ms. Taylor staged the three plays chronologically, to be viewed in a single evening. The current structure now begins with 17-year-old Iris and follows her until she is in her thirties.

**Why a trilogy? Developing The Trinity River Plays**

Although trilogies in theatre hark back to the classic Greek tragedians, it is rare to stumble across new three-part works. Goodman Theatre’s Literary Director Tanya Palmer explained that *The Trinity River Plays* was conceived as a trilogy from the beginning. Ms. Palmer noted that these three plays each have a different tone and style while still functioning as a whole. This choice allowed Ms. Taylor to have “room and flexibility” while telling the overall story of one woman experiencing three different parts of her life.

In literature, trilogies exist across genres. *The Millennium Trilogy*, written by Stieg Larsson, is a well-known example of a contemporary literary trilogy. Written in the 2000s, this thriller broke into the movie box office in 2009 with the first installment: *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Another contemporary trilogy is *The Brother/Sister Plays*, which played at Chicago’s Steppenwolf theater last year.
You’re hip to my jive. Your hootenanny has been a tra la, I’m so sure. You’re getting tailed by the five-oh or the pigs, but you give them the 23 Skiddoo. You walk back to your rowhome from the wash-a-teria hefting your laundry sack. You might “go down,” “go over” or go “downee.” You might even bring a wicked hot dish or some crawdads when you do.

Is any of this making any sense?

Slang has colored the English language for hundreds of years. We’re most familiar with American English slang, and even this has changed constantly over the decades. You may hear older people use words that sound strange and have absolutely no meaning for you, but have a real purpose and meaning for the speaker. And that’s often the way slang works. But to fully understand slang and its place in language – slanguage - it’s important to make a distinction between slang, dialect and colloquialism.

Dialect is speech particular to a region and happens in the form of local sayings, word pronunciations, patterns of speech and so on. Whether a person says “soda,” “pop” or “Coke” in reference to their soft drink is an example of a regional difference. A colloquialism is a word or phrase appropriate to informal or familiar conversation, instead of formal speech or writing. If you’ve ever heard a Chicagoan refer to a group of people as “youse,” or a friend say “what’s good?”, you have heard a colloquialism.

Slang is very similar, but is characterized by short-lived terms and figures of speech that coincide with fads and fashions and are often particular to a certain group—a person may continue to use slang from a particular period in his or her life, even if it’s no longer widely used. See “boss,” “radical,” “wicked” and even “the bee’s knees” as examples of words used to express intense appreciation of something. Often, slang also has a more negative connotation and can be used offensively, even in an effort to exclude or include certain people – sometimes, people dismiss environmentalists as “treehuggers.” According to American journalist and satirist H.L. Mencken, slang also is used to determine “outsideress,” or how familiar with the “cool” culture a person is.

The Trinity River Plays makes use of colloquialisms and dialect in the dialogue, showing how this family from Dallas, Texas, speaks throughout the years. Daisy uses terms like “cash machine” to mean “ATM” and Rose, in reference to her disbelief at her diagnosis, uses the turn of phrase “...doesn’t mean I’m buying that ticket.” Iris and Jasmine call each other “cuz” or “cousin.” These terms and titles could be products of the home background these women all share, but also their different ages—this language is less particular for the period (1970s) as it is the younger age group to which Iris and Jasmine belonged. Remember that slang can be specific to an age group as well as a region. These girls have a language, and not all Americans speak it; many of us have very distinct sayings and colloquialisms based on where we’re from. Even the retelling of a story can be affected by our regional culture; “he was all,” “she was like” or “and then they go” may be a person’s way of reporting what was said.

There are some fundamental linguistic differences from region to region in the U.S. For instance, here in Chicago, a person may say “it’s over by there” when he or she assumes familiarity with a place. And even people from outside Illinois are familiar with “Da Bears” but might get a little confused if you asked for a “Polish” or where the “cashbox” was. You might tell someone he or she can wear their gym shoes, but don’t bring them in the front room. You say pop, I say soda. The differences continue. The way people pronounce words can even have a profound effect on how they are understood, or how they are identified. For instance, many times in the script, Daisy says “ain’t.” This helps us to identify her as by her class and heritage, but is not so much an indication of region. Think about how some things you may say, like “OMG,” are entering the mainstream American vocabulary. Sometimes this happens when a niche expression becomes more widely used – like “ain’t,” which spread from rural American classes and slave songs/spirituals. What have you taken from your place of origin? Think about what you say that you adopted from your parents or people you grew up with, and what’s specific to your age group. Is it a colloquialism, or is it slang?

For some slang you might not have heard of, check out: http://www.manythings.org/slang/
Picture America in the 1950s. What does the phrase the American Dream bring to mind? Perhaps images of an iconic white-collar family complete with bread-winning husband, 2.3 children—the girls in pink and the boys in blue—and an angel of a housewife in the home start to materialize. How does the name Betty Freidan impact the picture? Just as modern advertising often shapes a utopia of glamour and beauty beyond the reach of the average citizen, these lofty ideals were unattainable for most American citizens on both social and financial fronts, as well as soul sucking for the select families struggling to fit the standards. With the dawn of the 1960s, Freidan swung a sledgehammer at the straining foundation with her 1963 work, The Feminine Mystique, an account strictly focusing upon the nonworking suburban wives—but her target was small. Although striking a nerve in the country’s gender network, this still dominant portrayal of womanly discontent during the 1960s dismisses the lives, battles and victories of the rest of America’s women. Freidan’s account of women’s life during the 1960s has been substantially criticized for ignoring these narratives.

During the tumultuous civil rights era and protests of the women’s movement, what stories of other women—battling race and class discrimination along with issues of gender—remain to be told?

The Trinity River Plays’ ever-working Rose and Daisy Spears serve as examples of women existing beyond the scope of the dominant “feminine mystique” women’s movement. The discontent of predominately white suburban wives was not a reality shared by much of the country. For many African American, Latino and other minority women, discontent came not from being without employment, but from the untold injustices at the workplace: sexism, discrimination, overtime without pay, wage inequality, lack of benefits and poor funding for educational resources within racially segregated communities. Activism had a quiet but powerful voice as these working mothers went out door-to-door, petitioning neighbors and enlightening their communities on issues such as educational reform in schools, health coverage and labor benefits.

Outside this door-to-door consciousness raising, the 1960s saw for the first time women entering into administrative spheres, stepping into roles that would directly impact other women. Grass-roots organizations

The Goodman’s production of Ruined by Lynn Nottage. From left to right: Condola Phyleia Rashad (Sophie), Cherise Booth (Josephine) and Quincy Tyler Bernstine (Salima). Photo by Liz Lauren.
to change public policy, state and government laws, and educational practices sprang up, often in combination with civil rights organizations.

These women ushered in a time for change. Through these organizations, women began to occupy places of power in the community and nationally. For example, Unita Blackwell, a prominent member of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (a nonviolent committee committed to ending segregation), became the first African American woman to become mayor in Mississippi. Blackwell boasts a career of community organizing, bringing attention and funding to otherwise substantially underserved communities nationwide. Annie Bell, another member of SNCC, became the first black woman to speak before the U.S. House of Representatives. The efforts of these and other women aided in bringing equality of representation and voice for the rest of their gender in America.

Equality For All: Papers to Paychecks

Forty-three years ago. The calendar on the wall reads 1968. On the kitchen counter rests an open daily paper, the Help Wanted section warming in the morning light. Glancing down the columns reveals a stark difference to the newspapers of 2011. There are two headers dividing the jobs in half: Men and Women. Gender has often played a large role in what jobs a person could feasibly attain. Gender discrimination kept men and women from applying for work on all levels of the career ladder. Although there still was—and still is—a glass ceiling to shatter in many ways, this division of labor kept both genders from seeking ways to provide for themselves and their families. This practice remained in effect in newspapers across the nation until the National Organization for Women effectively convinced the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to bar the practice of these gender segregated ads. And while de jure (by law, or legal) discrimination is now illegal, de facto (in active practice) discrimination still continues under the surface.

While sipping coffee this fine 1968 morning, the sun catches the ring finger of the hand holding the cup. How much of a factor did marriage play in employment? A wedding band could severely limit employment prospects for women. Up until the late 1960s, flight attendants were exclusively single women. Why? Because once a stewardess said, “I do,” the airlines promptly and legally would dismiss her from her job. Although gender, race and class still statistically impact hiring practices and skew the economic landscape of today, many of the blatantly sexist norms of the past are no longer acceptable.

The calendar flips a few decades into the future to 2011. What is the current gender and job landscape? From before the 1950s and onwards, women were often sent home with slimmer paychecks than were their male counterparts. This is still the case today. Regardless of profession, educational background or hours spent on the job, a wage gap of nearly 12 percent leaves women trailing their male counterparts (black women have it even worse at as little as 67.5 percent of all men’s earnings.) A battle for women’s job rights has been going on in the Armed Services Committee’s Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel for the past several weeks in response to a different problem – since the Combat Exclusion Act in 1948, women have been banned from combat duty in the Air Force, Marines and Navy. The hearings around this issue have focused on last month’s amendment, by Colorado Democrat Patricia Schroeder, which seeks to remove this ban and push for gender-blind government services. This battle, in their opinion, is starting with the armed services. Based on the results of these hearings, this amendment could become law! Is there a dream job in the future? Ideally, an individual’s qualifications will earn the position and paycheck, without gender, race or class factoring into the process.
Regina Taylor’s play is set in the real neighborhood of South Oak Cliff, Dallas, Texas—just a stone’s throw from the Trinity River, a 710-mile waterway that runs through the state of Texas. The city of Dallas is nestled just below two of the river’s four branches: the West Fork and the Elm Fork. At Dallas, these two forks merge into the main river and create the Trinity River. A major highway runs along the river, and the river itself is flanked by wetlands that have kept major city structures at a distance.

Through most of the city, Trinity River divides North and South Dallas. South Oak Cliff, an informally defined community within the larger Oak Cliff neighborhood, lies on the south side of this river. Shortly before the time of Jar Fly in the late 1970s, South Oak Cliff shifted from a predominantly white community to predominantly African American. When economic redevelopment—led by an effort to preserve the enclave’s historic homes—was introduced to Oak Cliff in the 1980s, South Oak Cliff was left behind. It remains sadly underdeveloped to this day, even as North Oak Cliff development continues.

For more than a century this river has informed Dallas life - from fishing to flooding - but like many American rivers, it has been subjected to pollution and misuse. One of the major events focused on this region has been the Trinity River Corridor Project, a public works project in downtown Dallas. Originally designed as a measure against the river’s excessive flooding, it has become

a major architectural urban works project designed to transform the area into an enviable urban park. The project’s goal is to become, as the website terms it, “an opportunity for community revitalization, economic development and the creation of a world-class greenway.” It aims to improve flood control as well as to inject the area with much-needed economic development and environmental restoration.

These developments have not yet occurred in the time period in which most of The Trinity River Plays takes place. How do you think environmental neglect and damage caused by the levee system and a lack of economic development could have impacted the lives of the people living nearby—specifically Iris’ family? What presence do you think the constant threat of floods held for them?
A blanket term for several different disorders, cancer affects different parts of the body, blood and body tissues. It most often is characterized by normal cell growth that goes out of control and can spread to other parts of the body. Cancer is, in short, a disease created by mutating cells—while normal cells would gradually die off, cancerous cells continue to grow and multiply. This may be caused by a dormant gene that turns the cell cancerous, leading to abnormal growth.

Cancer cells do not respond normally to growth factors (signals from other parts of the body and other cells), and are not always recognized by the body’s immune system. As a result, they are allowed to grow and multiply. Many types of cancer also are caused by carcinogens—cancer-causing agents—found in what we eat, drink or breathe in. It spreads and can eventually kill the infected person because cancer cells don’t appear to be very different from healthy cells, and so are often not recognized by the body’s immune system. Unlike other sicknesses, such as viruses, the body may not recognize cancer cells as foreign. Cancer statistics are usually measured in terms of cancer incidence—numbers of victims who are diagnosed with cancer or cancerous formations; and cancer mortality—number of victims who die from a form of cancer.

Because cancer can affect many different types of tissue, cancer comes in many forms with varying degrees of severity. Some cancers start in the head, stomach or other bodily organs. Others grow deep in the bones or travel through the bloodstream. Common forms of cancer include melanoma (skin cancer) and lung cancer (often attributed to smoking and other inhaled carcinogens.) Some of the most common cancers affect only one sex, such as prostate cancer – a disorder found in the male reproductive gland that is completely treatable with early detection. Two of the most deadly varieties are types you may have heard of: breast cancer and ovarian cancer, which is almost always fatal.
Dangerous Disorders

Remember that cancerous cell formations are usually named for the part of the body in which they develop. These cancerous cells are referred to as malignant, and group and mutate in large clusters called tumors. Breast cancer begins as malignant tumors in the breast, a mutation which can occur in a woman or a man. In women, breast cancer can develop in the lobules (milk-producing glands) or ducts. While dangerous in this area alone, the cancer can become an even greater risk if it spreads to the immune system’s lymph nodes in the breast or underarm areas. As these nodes are part of the immune system, they are connected to the bloodstream. Once the cancer reaches these, it can spread to any part of the body.

In The Trinity River Plays, Rose suffers from late stage ovarian cancer. This cancer begins in the ovaries, which are the reproductive glands that produce ovum, or eggs, the female gametes. They are also the source of the female hormones estrogen and progesterone. Tumors can occur in any of the three types of ovarian tissue—epithelial, germ and stromal cells—and most of them are benign (not dangerous or cancerous). Unfortunately, such is not the case with Iris’ mother—hers is malignant (cancerous.) As Iris speculates, the cancer may have been brought on by Rose’s predisposed DNA—that is, her potential for cancerous growths in her ovaries could have been written into her family genetics. The treatment the doctors propose is a special type of surgery, but Daisy disagrees with Iris’ ideas about the origins of the cancer. They could be a mystery, or as Iris says “...just a toss of a coin.”

Treatments

Cancer treatments range from medications and drugs to surgery to radiation therapy and beyond. One of the common treatments is chemotherapy, which uses high doses of drugs and medication to treat cancer, often with side effects. Operations are even more common, as most cancer patients often undergo surgery with scalpels (a small, thin surgical knife) or laser to diagnose and treat cancerous formations. Chemotherapy and surgery have long been used, but some newer treatments have emerged. Radiation therapy uses beams of radioactive particles from internal or external devices to destroy cancer cells. Immunotherapy employs the body’s own immune system to fight cancer. Targeted therapy utilizes drugs and other substances to focus on particular types of cells without damaging surrounding healthy tissue. Photodynamic therapy uses a combination of drugs and light, and hyperthermia relies on extremely high heat to destroy tumors—it also can help other types of treatment to work better by heating cells to a particular temperature. Still others involve more extreme measures, replacing the marrow from bones and even replacing blood. Transplants and transfusions replace damaged blood and tissue with healthy material.

Rose, as we find out in Rain, is set to undergo surgery. Surgery allows the patient to attempt to resume normal life shortly after the procedure—a matter of days or weeks. Radiation therapy users may not even experience side effects, although those that do may experience
fatigue and depression. Targeted treatments such as hyperthermia also can produce side effects that range in severity and include nausea and vomiting. Often, a treatment’s side effects can depend on what part of the body it is applied to and for how long. Other treatments can last much longer with even stronger side effects—especially whole-body treatments.

Chemotherapy, while usually thought of as cancer treatment, actually refers to the use of any chemical drug to treat any illness. It is one of the earliest forms of treatment. As it relates to cancer, chemotherapy is a systemic treatment—that is, rather than focusing on the location of the cancer, it travels throughout the body and seeks to destroy cancer cells wherever they may be. There are different ways to take chemo, and more than 100 medications can be used for the process.

Chemotherapy also is known for being very painful—some medications can have far-reaching side effects that a patient may have to endure during a long treatment process. These side effects occur because in the process of destroying cancer cells, drugs (taken orally or injected into the blood or muscle) also may damage healthy tissue in bones and blood cells, hair follicles and cells lining the digestive and reproductive tracts. People who use these treatments often get sick and are cautioned to keep caretakers and family members safe from bodily fluids that can contain traces of the medication. Many patients who undergo this treatment experience difficulty with digestion or sexual activity.

Reaching Out, Being Reached

To learn more about cancer causes, risks, diagnosis and treatment visit http://www.cancer.org or call The American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345.

The American Cancer Society links to helpful resources for cancer victims, their families and loved ones. Their special programs range from the Cancer Survivors Network, Hope Lodge and I Can Cope (a cancer education program) to special support programs such as Road to Recovery (rides for patients), Reach to Recovery (breast cancer support), Man to Man (prostate cancer support) and Look Good... Feel Better for teens and adults. They also offer TLC, a line of hair loss and mastectomy products for women and men, as well as the opportunity for cancer survivors to share their success stories online. From the ACS and other organizations, the message is clear: Some of the best treatment for any kind of cancer is knowledge and preparation.
Despite the government’s altruistic claim, there was never any truth in the concept of “separate but equal.” Segregation demanded that, according to one’s race, people were assigned different drinking fountains, different seats in the movie theatre, different spots on the bus. Conditions were never equal. African Americans and other people of color were subjected to inferior conditions and public facilities.

One of the areas in which this was, and continues to be, pronounced is the world of healthcare. Over the years, people in the African-American community have been subjected to inferior healthcare standards that have made a dramatic impact in the way they view long term healthcare and seek treatment for serious illness. In turn, this has affected mortality rates for certain diseases among African-American communities. It is said, based on conducted surveys and studies of patient demographics, that African-American patients get “treated later, and die sooner.” But why? The answer involves a troubled history with medical care relations and a culture of suspicion.

The Tuskegee Experiment & Henrietta Lacks

In the fall of 1932, the US Public Health Service (USPHS) initiated an experiment on 400 syphilitic and 200 uninfected African-American men in Alabama’s rural Tuskegee.

These men were never informed that they were participating in an experiment. In fact, contrary information was relayed to them: they thought they were receiving free healthcare for a condition known in the rural South as “bad blood.” So, under the guise of healthcare, these syphilitic men were monitored to see how the disease would manifest and ruin them. This experiment was only to last six months, but, shockingly, it lasted 40 years, until the media finally broke the story and informed the public of its inhumanity. Even when, in 1947, penicillin was discovered to cure syphilis simply and easily, the USPHS refused to treat these syphilitic participants, and, instead, opted to let them suffer through this disease until it killed them. Even when the Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) department

United States Life expectancy table. Graph courtesy of Dr. Kington (Grinnell College)
investigated this experiment, their results left out the plain fact that these men were misled and believed they were receiving healthcare. This study deceived its participants from the initial stages and knowingly deprived proper care to ailing individuals; thus, it exploited its participants, who happened to be members of an impoverished minority, to its own gain.

The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment was still under way when, in 1951, Henrietta Lacks, a beautiful young African-American mother, was diagnosed with cervical cancer. She sought treatment at Johns Hopkins Hospital, where a doctor took a biopsy of her malignant cells and kept it for research purposes with neither her knowledge nor consent. When Lacks died a mere six months later from the cancer, she had no idea how her cells would change scientific history. Lacks’ cells were the first known **immortal cells**, which means they are able to maintain virility and proliferation indefinitely. It was because of Lacks’ cells, known as **HeLa Immortal Cells**, that scientists were able to discover a cure for polio. Doctors reproduced her cells in mass quantities, (more than 20 tons as of today) and sent them around the globe to other researchers for nearly every medical pursuit. HeLa cells have been used to test product safety on humans in addition to the effectiveness of treatments for such illnesses as leukemia, hemophilia and Parkinson’s disease. While doctors and researchers were busy experimenting with Lacks’ cells, her family was forced to bury her in an unmarked grave, because they could not afford a headstone. Finally, in 1976, a writer for *Rolling Stone* reported the story of Lacks’ cells, and her family became aware of this controversy. Meanwhile, Lacks’ family could not benefit from her enormous contribution to the medical research community because they could not afford insurance. And it wasn’t until 2010 that the Morehouse School of Medicine donated money to provide Henrietta Lacks with a proper headstone. It took nearly sixty years for the medical community to acknowledge even the simplest gesture of reparation for the exploitation of Henrietta Lacks.

**Suspicious Healthcare**

These points in history are only two of many instances where the African-American community was misled and/or deceived by US healthcare. The precedent set by healthcare and medical research in the United States continued to demonstrate to the black community that it is not to be trusted, that its intention was to exploit African Americans instead of saving them. This precedent made itself apparent until the Civil Rights Movement, when laws and regulations came into effect in order to monitor quality assurance of healthcare to all. In addition to the maintenance of this distrust, African-American communities were (and, in some places, still are) kept far from adequate healthcare due to segregation.

It is commonly theorized that throughout the United States segregation leads to poverty, since segregation’s intention is to keep the minority from integrating and advancing into the mainstream; those segregated cultures and communities are considered **marginalized**. Segregated and impoverished communities often have little or no access to transportation, which leaves them literally immobilized within their communities. Without mobility, these communities are unable to access quality jobs, nutrition, and, you guessed it, healthcare. Even our dear city of Chicago – a City of Neighborhoods - is still residentially segregated.

This combination of a suspicious and invisible healthcare system creates a culture of fear and mistrust. When, in *The Trinity River Plays*, Rose finally sees the doctor, it is understood that she had let her cancer manifest itself for over a year without mentioning her horrific symptoms to anyone – not even her own sister. By the time the doctor diagnosed Rose’s cancer, it was so advanced that she had to endure a hysterectomy in order to attempt to stop the cancer’s growth. Daisy tries to explain to Iris why Rose waited so long, telling her that, in their generation, everyone took care of him or herself before they went to the doctor, saying, “we pulled our own teeth. You pregnant – you better dig a hole and squat. That’s where we come from.”

African Americans suffer higher rates of chronic illness such as asthma, diabetes, and cancer, and higher rates of obesity than the U.S. population overall. Since last year’s healthcare reform, there is a further call for addendums to help eliminate these disparities by creating culturally appropriate public health initiatives, invoking community support, and providing equitable access to quality health care. As of the 2000 US Census, African Americans’ life expectancy is six years shorter than whites at birth and two years shorter at age sixty-five.
The numbers are high. One in four women, and one in 30 men, are the survivors of sexual abuse; whether rape, incest, or other forms of sexual assault. These current statistics illustrate the shocking presence of sexual abuse, while at the same time detail the culture of silence around it.

**What defines Rape?**

Each state maintains a set definition for sexual abuse which includes varying legal definitions for rape, incest, and sexual assault. It is important to remember that anyone, regardless of gender or sexual orientation can be a survivor of sexual assault. In her examination of sexual assault, author Joanna Bourke in her work *Rape. Sex Violence History* defines rape as “the embodied violation of another person.”

*Rape* is forced sexual intercourse, including vaginal, anal, or oral penetration. Rape survivors may be forced through threats or physical means. In about 8 out of 10 rapes, no weapon is used other than physical force. Anyone may be a survivor of rape: women, men or children, straight or gay.

**Sexual Assault** is unwanted sexual contact that stops short of rape or attempted rape. This includes sexual touching and fondling.

**Incest** is sexual contact between persons who are so closely related that their marriage is illegal (e.g., parents and children, uncles/aunts and nieces/nephews, etc.). This usually takes the form of an older family member sexually abusing a child or adolescent.

Regina Taylor’s *The Trinity River Plays* chronicles the life of Iris Spears, a teenage incest survivor. Unfortunately, Taylor’s fictional account of Iris’ story resonates closely to what, statistically, is a silent reality for many teenagers. This seemingly atypical plot is opposite to what many perceive as a classic sexual assault story. The dominant belief in cases of sexual assault is that
the assailant is a stranger to the survivor. Likewise, this common belief of rape only occurring via a stranger attack perpetuates the myth that abuse strictly occurs in environments unknown to the survivor. In reality, abuse often happens in the home of either the survivor or the assailant, and the survivor most often knows the assailant. Likewise, sexual assault can occur on a date, in a long-term relationship, and even within a marriage. Thus rape, defined as the unwanted violation of another person, can occur between two people that know one another quite well.

The definitions below provide language to define sexual abuse that occurs between two individuals that know one another prior to the abuse.

**Acquaintance Rape** occurs between individuals with a prior history. RAINN defines the act as assault [which involves coercive sexual activities that occur against a person’s will by means of force, violence, duress, or fear of bodily injury. These sexual activities are imposed upon them by someone they know (a friend, date, acquaintance, etc.).

**Date Rape** is unwanted sexual assault which occurs on a date. The website, Girl Teen Healing from Rape Incest Victoriously Emerge (or GirlThrive at http://www.girlthrive.com/) offers the following definition of “any time you are forced to have sex with someone you are with on a date, or ended up with at a given time by choice.”

It is important to remember that anyone can be a survivor of sexual abuse and that statistics involving sexual abuse are underreported. Many survivors never report the violence for fear of stigma, guilt, shame, or blame regarding the incident. RAINN, at: http://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-victims, provides the following statistical breakdown of reported survivors of rape. These numbers represent data from 2003-2007 from U.S. Department of Justice’s National Crime Victimization Survey.

**Percentage of American women, by race, who have experienced rape or attempted rape during their lifetime:**
- All women: 17.6%
- White women: 17.7%
- Black women: 18.8%
- Asian Pacific Islander women: 6.8%
- American Indian/Alaskan women: 34.1%
- Mixed race women: 24.4%

**Children:**
15% of sexual assault and rape survivors are under age 12, and girls ages 16-19 are four times more likely than the general population to be survivors of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault.

- 7% of girls in grades 5-8 and 12% of girls in grades 9-12 said they had been sexually abused.

- 3% of boys grades 5-8 and 5% of boys in grades 9-12 said they had been sexually abused.

93% of juvenile sexual assault survivors know their attacker.
- 34.2% of attackers were family members.
- 58.7% were acquaintances.
- Only 7% of the perpetrators were strangers to the survivor.

For survivors of sexual abuse, there are multiple resources both in Chicago and nationally. Some, specifically, cater to teenagers and those under 18 years of age. These institutions are set up to provide resources to both survivors and those caring for abused individuals. Many times an advocate, one that supports or promotes the interests of an abused individual, will be present throughout the case.
Opus sectile panel with the rape of Hylas by the Nymphs. A Roman artwork, from the first half of the 4th century. From the basilica of Junius Bassus on the Esquiline Hill.

Call:

Below are phone numbers for hotlines that are free of charge and open 24/7. The person on the other end is there to listen, and provide survivors and their aids resources.

Call 800-656-HOPE (800-656-4673) RAINN National Hotline
Call 888-293-2080 in Chicago Metropolitan Area
Call 630-971-3927 in DuPage County
Call 708-748-5672 in the South Suburbs

Websites:

http://www.girlthrive.com/: Girl Teen Healing from Rape Incest Victoriously Emerge

http://www.generationfive.org/: Dedicated to ending child abuse in the next five generations.


Hope for those recovering from abuse:

There is life beyond the abuse. The Trinity River Plays’ Iris, although suffering in different ways, was able to survive her abuse and grow into a very talented author. Writing is often an act of healing for survivors of sexual trauma. The anthology, Invisible Girls: The Truth About Sexual Abuse–A Book for Teen Girls, Young Women, and Everyone Who Cares About Them by Patti Feuereisen is an example of survivors speaking out after their abuse. When asked to address their stories, Dr. Feuereisen who also maintains the website http://www.girlthrive.com,
found that the authors “use names of gems and flowers as pseudonyms.”

Likewise, although the statistics of sexual abuse report high numbers, RAINN also cites that “Sexual assault has fallen by more than 60% in recent years. Had the 1993 rate held steady, 6.8 million Americans would have been assaulted in the last 13 years. But, thanks to the decline, the actual number of survivors was about 4.2 million. In other words, if not for the historic gains we’ve made in the last decade, an additional 2,546,420 Americans would have become victims of sexual violence” (http://www.rainn.org/). There are opportunities to heal. There are organizations to reach out to for help, no matter who you are.

Unlikely Victims: Men and Sexual Abuse
BY WILLIAM LANDON

Although the consensus image of a rape victim is that of a woman, a considerable portion of rape victims are male.

About one in six male rape victims report being sexually abused as children before age 12. About three percent—or 1 in 33—of all men have reported being the victim of rape or sexual abuse at some point in their lives. Although even these numbers may seem shocking, countless other cases go unreported. It’s been estimated that men make up about 10 percent of all rape victims. About 71 percent of these men are raped before age 18; just more than 12 percent are raped after age 25. The fact that there is still a proportionately low percentage of recorded male rape victims, despite the statistics, can be attributed to several phenomena.

It is easy to assume that a male rape victim was violated as a child and that the perpetrator was an older man. This certainly happens, but an under-recognized percentage of male rape victims have been violated as adults—sometimes by women. Allegations of rape committed by women have long been dismissed, based on the belief that females are incapable of committing such a crime and that men are incapable of allowing themselves to be victimized or even feel violated by the act. Only recently, starting in the 1970s and early ’80s, more men have started pointing the finger at female abusers. Once the denial ended, strict definitions of rape have been relaxed. Since then, society has increasingly conceded that men can suffer from rape, especially following the 2004 incidents of sexual violence committed by female soldiers at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

In the case of sexual violation by a man, cultural norms have led us to believe the male victim secretly wanted the intercourse, as otherwise he would have protected himself. But in reality, male victims are just as unprepared as female victims are. A man’s stature, contrary to what many claim in courtrooms, also will not protect him from rape. Many men are unable to react because they are totally unprepared for an assault, even from a woman of a much smaller physical build. Too
shocked or embarrassed by the violation, many men fail to report their experiences.

In many men’s minds, this becomes a battle of sexual identity. For heterosexual men, psychological damage from the act may focus more on the sexual aspect than the violence as the male victim begins to question his sexual identity. When the perpetrator is female, the odds against the accusation being accepted are even worse. If a man comes forward with an accusation or confession, he simply may not be taken seriously. A culture of skepticism has always surrounded the crime of rape and continues to do so. Both male and female rape victims often are afraid to come forward at the risk of not being believed, attributing to the high percentage (60 percent) of estimated unreported assaults.

More attention has been paid to male rape victims in recent years. Through case studies—long-term psychological studies of individual survivors—the stories of men who have been victims of rape and sexual abuse have emerged. These studies have helped to debunk several stereotypes, some of which might be familiar to you. For instance, most people believe (due partly to portrayals in film and on television) that men are only raped in prison or in the Army, but it is just as common for a man to be raped in the home or public locations. According to studies, more post-puberty male rape victims are abused outdoors and in secluded public venues than they are in any other place.

Whether a man is victimized as a child or as an adult, the perpetrator is likely to be someone close to the victim. He or she could be a family member, an acquaintance, even a service professional. Men also have been victims of married rape and sexual abuse from a spouse. Often, gay men are attacked by other men as an act of anti-gay violence. This act is no indicator of the sexual orientation of the perpetrator—it is an act of anger and violence.

The sexual orientation of the perpetrator is rarely a factor in any case. Rape is not about attraction but about power, dominance and violence. Whether a victim is male or female, regardless of gender, age, social status or any other circumstance, it is never the victim’s fault.

The Us Navy stands against sexual assault. Photo courtesy United States Navy.
In *The Trinity River Plays*, Regina Taylor tells the story of a young black writer much like herself; a girl who knows what she wants to achieve but operates in a world that constantly works against her dreams and expectations. Regina and Iris have built on the legacy of other female African American writers to achieve status and leave their mark on the world through the way they express themselves.

The early works of African American women playwrights in America through the 1900s to 1920s (Harlem Renaissance) had a major impact on black community theater, the heart of African American theater during and after the Harlem Renaissance. Theirs was a unique perspective on protest theater, which characterized black American theater at that time. They have been praised for introducing new audiences to compassionately rendered characters and for filling in the missing pieces of black identity in theater and culture. The canon of earlier plays by black women, as professor Elizabeth Brown Guillory writes in *Their Place on the Stage*, seems to be made up of “seven forms: (1) protest; (2) genteel school; (3) folk; (4) historical (interchangeable with race pride and black nationalism); (5) religious; (6) fantasy; and (7) feminist.” Many of these plays contained multiple forms, as black women protested various dichotomies (dual oppositions) in American society. As well as characterizing a great voice of the Harlem Renaissance, these attitudes paved the way for future writers.
This post-Harlem Renaissance “next generation” of black women playwrights made their way from the community to the world of professional theater. These women had a tough mission, but they attacked it with determination: to create new representations of black identity and to contradict stereotypes that had been put in place by white and black male dramatists alike. These women created work that tackled a variety of issues facing black women in post-World War II America and took on even broader worldviews.

**Newer Generations of Playwrights**

Regina Taylor builds on the legacy of these African American women playwrights before her—women who strove to capture the black female experience through their plays. Many of the most provocative, relevant plays of the mid- to late 20th century have been written by black women. The most well-known and persistently powerful have been adapted to film or are still produced on world stages. Black theater, and theater on the whole from the 1940s to today, has been influenced by three powerhouse generations: Alice Childress and her predecessors, Lorraine Hansberry and Ntozake Shange, and Lynn Nottage and Suzan Lori-Parks today.

**Alice Childress**, born in 1920 in Charleston, South Carolina, began forming her powerful career at the American Negro Theatre in Harlem. She also became heavily involved in social causes and worked for Actor’s Equity Association (the union for actors and stage managers) and at the Harlem Stage Hand Local Union. She began as an actor, not a writer, but soon broke into the scene with her 1949 play *Florence*. Childress’ constant stirring of the pot produced fantastic results for her career: She was the first woman and African American to win the Obie Award (similar to the Tony Award, but for Off-Broadway work) for her 1955 play *Trouble in Mind*. This would be followed by two of her most famous works, *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969) and *A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ But a Sandwich* (1973). *A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ But a Sandwich* earned her fame but also became the target of harsh criticism for its depiction of a 13-year-old urban boy struggling with a heroin addiction—a topic that many considered inappropriate for a children’s book. It was included in a Supreme Court lawsuit targeting certain young adult books. Childress later adapted the novel for the 1978 film version. She died in 1994.

**Lorraine Hansberry**, born on May 19, 1930, on Chicago’s South Side, was the youngest of four children. She grew up in a politically involved, black middle-class family that worked to fight Chicago’s discriminatory real estate practices. This early life may have influenced her most famous work, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), the story of a black family from Chicago’s South Side who faces political and social turmoil upon moving into a white neighborhood. Her uncle Leo Hansberry, an African history professor at Howard University, also had a profound impact on her beliefs. She regularly attended the theater in college at University of Wisconsin, but she left to write for the radical New York-based black newspaper *Freedom*. She resigned three years later and began writing plays. Her interracial marriage in 1953 to Robert Nemiroff eventually ended and she began to openly identify as a lesbian, but the two maintained a close friendship. Her career continued to skyrocket, as *A Raisin in the Sun* became an immediate success during its run. It earned Hansberry the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play of the Year; she was the youngest playwright and first person of color to win the award. This work also earned the distinction as the first Broadway play by a black woman. Until her untimely death in 1965 after a battle with cancer, she continued to write and champion the rights of black Americans, gay men and lesbians.

**Ntozake Shange** was born in 1948 as Paulette Williams. Her adopted first name means “she who
comes with her own things” and her last name means “who walks like a lion.” She grew up among many famous jazz musicians (her parents’ friends), Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis among them. She attended Barnard College and graduated with honors. After graduation she moved to Harlem where she became engrossed in the plight of black American women. She later studied at the University of Southern California. From her experiences and attempted suicides, she wrote her most famous work, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When The Rainbow is Enuf*, in 1975. Adapted for the stage, it ran both Off-Broadway and on Broadway before travelling abroad. It uses 20 poems for seven actors to tell the story of black women who have overcome severe pain and depression. More recently, the poems have been adapted into the film *For Colored Girls*. Shange continues to write drama, prose fiction and poetry.

**Lynn Nottage** is one of the greatest playwrights blossoming in their careers today. Her work *Crumbs From the Table of Joy* was produced here at Goodman Theatre in 2006. One of her best known works, *Ruined*, premiered here as well in 2008. Nottage was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1964 to a schoolteacher and a child psychologist. She is a graduate of Brown University and the Yale School of Drama, and she branched out to nontheatrical outreach when she worked with Amnesty International following graduate school. She received the MacArthur Genius Grant in 2007. Her best known play is perhaps *Intimate Apparel*, but *Ruined* gained press coverage and national interest as a play following the known plight of several women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during their country’s civil war. Much of her writing focuses on the social concerns of black women from perspectives which many other writers fail to cover, such as the lives of women in war-torn societies and the lives of black women in industry (like her seamstress protagonist in *Intimate Apparel*).

**Suzan Lori-Parks** is also one of the most active and influential writers in American theater today. She was named one of TIME Magazine’s “100 Innovators for the Next New Wave” and earned the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. It’s fitting that both her life and fame are international. Born into a U.S. military family in 1963 in Fort Knox, Kentucky, she travelled from state to state until her family settled in Germany. There she attended local German high school in lieu of the English-language schools offered on the base. She returned to the U.S. and enrolled at Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts with double studies in English and German. After a post-graduate year spent acting in London, she arrived once again in America and began her playwriting career in New York City. Many of her first plays were produced in the East Village. Parks’ well-known play *Topdog/Underdog* earned her the Pulitzer Prize. She is also well-known for her project 365 Days/365 Plays, the end product of her idea to write one play each day of the year through 2002. First produced in 2007, it has been performed in theaters worldwide. Parks is also known for her screenplay for Spike Lee’s *Girl 6* and her contributions to Oprah’s film adaptation of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She currently holds the master writer residency at the Public Theatre in New York City and is hard at work on a Ray Charles musical.

These five incredible women, whose accomplishments reach beyond even the limits of writing for the stage, are only a few of the great black female playwrights who have defined a niche for themselves on the American and world stages. Through decades of changing identities, African American women continue to offer absolutely essential perspectives to the new world theater. As Suzan Lori-Parks stated: “I’m encouraging people to rethink what a black play is—that a black play is perhaps a work of theater that invites everyone to the table.”
Paper. Pen in hand. Assignment and deadline set; this is the day to finish the story.

“Once upon a time … She was all in white, her hair cascading down around her shoulders. Their eyes met … Furthermore; the arguments against his opinions regarding poverty have been overthrown by various world leaders, however … And then ... and then ... then ...

Silence.

A lost voice is a painful experience. Physically, the sensation is a sandpaper itching in the throat, leaving the now mute speaker acutely aware of his or her vocal chords. Mentally, writer’s block functions much in the same way. Topic looming, deadline waiting, and suddenly it is impossible to capture a single, clear, coherent, entertaining thought. In Regina Taylor’s *The Trinity River Plays*, Iris experiences such a state. The play Rain – the second in the trilogy - finds Iris with five successful novels under her belt and a sixth oddity—a seemingly experimental adaptation that leaves her family searching for the meaning of it. When her mother, Rose, presses her about new work, Iris speaks of being in “a dry spell.” She’s awaiting a muse, a voice, to speak to her once again. This malady is a universal nuisance, but what exactly is it? What causes writer’s block, and who does it affect? And perhaps, most importantly, is there a cure?

Merriam-Webster defines writer’s block as “a psychological inhibition preventing a writer from proceeding with a piece.” A “psychological inhibition” may take form as anxiety or of over-thinking obligations and often stems from stressful circumstances in the writer’s life. These circumstances, either as present distress or ghosts from the past, potentially halt creativity for a matter of hours or years. Blocks can silence a project at any time during the writing process, and may even cripple an author before the first word is down upon the page. Writer’s block also can occur in select genres. For example, if a playwright also dabbles in novels, they may continue to come easily while writing a play becomes an intolerable labor or vise versa. In Iris’ case the stressors of family and other personal relationships, combined with childhood trauma, most likely create her particular “dry spell.” Essentially, no person is immune from writer’s block, regardless of talent, age, time or passion.

**Case Studies: Then and Now**

Perhaps the term writer’s block itself reads as ancient. Images of quills by parchment or stacks of notebook paper and pens lying idle come to mind. Now, picture a blank Word document with the cursor constantly blinking. There is an unknown hand inching toward ‘backspace’ after each deliberate keystroke. Is this

Iris Spears (Karen Aldridge) writing in *The Trinity River Plays*. Photo by Brandon Thibodeaux.
image hitting close to home? Historically, the public has been familiar with the struggles of a few famous authors such as Samuel Coleridge and Virginia Woolf. Each author wrote prolifically in turn, while also suffering from mental health disorders such as depression. Samuel Coleridge was an English poet who wrote during 1772-1834 and was a figurehead of the Romantic Movement in literature. Along with crafting the famous poem “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Coleridge wrote the unfinished epic poem, “Kubla Kahn.” An alcoholic and opium addict, Coleridge likewise suffered from a failed marriage and troubled childhood. For Coleridge, the manifestations of writer’s block came when he went to work in his chosen art form, poetry. He compares writing poetry to hunting for a specific type of game (or animal) in the field. He describes his attempts as “[to] beat up Game of far other kind—instead of a convoy of poetic Partridges with whirring wings of music ... up came a Metaphysical bustard (buzzard), urging its slow, heavy, laborious, earth-skimming flight over dreary and level Wastes.” Woolf, another English author who lived from 1882-1941, spoke specifically of ways for women to combat writer’s block. In her speech and essay, “A Room of One’s Own,” Woolf details the necessity for an author of fiction to have a peaceful and isolated environment in order to write. Woolf was sensitive to the needs of authors, and as an exquisite novelist knew firsthand the agony of a silent pen.

But what of authors today? Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling gives a modern testimony to the presence of writer’s block. In a 2004 interview, Rowling shared her anxiety after the fame of her first book:

“For the first time ever in my life, I got writer’s block. The stakes seemed to have gone up a lot, and I attracted a lot of publicity in Britain for which I was utterly unprepared. Never in my wildest imaginings had I pictured my face in the papers—particularly captioned, as they almost all were, with the words ‘penniless single mother.’ It is hard to be defined by the most difficult part of your life. But that aspect of the story is, thankfully, receding a little in Britain; the books are now the story, which suits me fine.”

Rowling links her experience with writer’s block to another common cause: fear. Once successful, will subsequent works match an author’s initial masterpiece? Now that writer’s block claims victims of both genders, in all genres and across centuries, how is it overcome?
Inspiration

Just as there are many cures to the common cold, so are there methods to tackle a chronic case of writer's block. Perhaps the best advice is simply to write. If a topic is stopping an entire train of thought, bypass it for the time being and write around it. Chronology is able to be altered at the final draft. Free writing, or the process of writing whatever comes up in the moment, is also a technique writers use to travel down a new bend. Research likewise can embolden a timid topic. There are times when the best thing to do is to put the subject aside and allow the idea to percolate quietly while reading, enjoying a movie, or chatting to a friend on the phone. It may be an entirely new idea when picked up again.

Below are some inspirational quotes from famous writers who understand firsthand the frustrations writing can bring. Sometimes, absorbing a well-worded phrase can rekindle inspiration as well.

Writers on Writing

“Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.” — Mark Twain

“One way to beat writer’s block is by writing even more, nonstop. You hit a wall, you turn left or right, you don’t stop, you keep going. Or in my case, I floor it and go right through that damn wall.” — Eugene-John Pescoran

“If there’s a book you really want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.” — Toni Morrison

“If my doctor told me I had only six minutes to live, I wouldn’t brood. I’d type a little faster.” — Isaac Asimov

“Ever tried and failed? No matter.Try again and fail better.” — Samuel Beckett

“Best advice on writing I’ve ever received. Finish.” — Peter Mayle

“A great deal of talent is lost to the world for want of a little courage.” — Sydney Smith

“If you want to write, you can. Fear stops most people from writing, not lack of talent. Who am I? What right have I to speak? Who will listen to me? You are a human being with a unique story to tell. You have every right.” — Richard Rhodes

To help you avoid the perils of writer’s block, check out our writing exercises at: http://education.goodmantheatre.org
It is roughly 10 minutes since a picture of me, standing with a 6-foot-tall gopher, has been tagged on Facebook. My sister is already texting me: “LOL—who is in the gopher suit?!” My sister is 36 years old. She has a husband. She also has a child. She wakes up before 10 a.m. on Saturday by choice. Why is she texting me about my silly photographs minutes after someone else posted them?

The same reason my former professor, boyfriend, current employer and previous students know my religious views are best described as “Thom Yorke”: Facebook. Facebook is a perpetrator of many evils, primarily my family initiating conversations with me based on the content of my (or even my friends’) Facebook content. Luckily, privacy settings allow me to filter posts and thus limit the inquiries into my personal life based on online fodder. Many people, though, are even more open than I am on Facebook, posting photographs, tweets, blog entries, Foursquare locations and more straight to their wall.

In August 2010, Google chief executive officer Eric Schmidt went on record with the Wall Street Journal: “I don’t believe society understands what happens when everything is available, knowable and recorded by everyone all the time.” He predicts, apparently seriously, that every young person one day will be entitled automatically to change his or her name on reaching adulthood in order to disown youthful hijinks stored on their friends’ social media sites. “I mean we really have to think about these things as a society. ‘I’m not even talking about the really terrible stuff, terrorism and access to evil things,” he says in the article. (Jenkins 2010).

Could it be that we live in a society in which the right to make mistakes is gone? Certainly the open access to information can be fun, but what happens when this information haunts us? I grew up in an age of Internet hesitation, always being wary of what information I posted online in public spaces such as my AOL profile. Now, with the advent of social media, many users post personal content without a concrete idea of how many unknown people are accessing said media. Even if your Facebook information is safe, who are you friends with, what do they post publicly and what other profile content can provide inadvertent connections to you online? Even if you don’t link Facebook directly to your Twitter or blog, similar user names, or the same email address when you sign up, can make it easy to find you online. For many college grads, privatizing social media has become a necessary process in the job hunt; for old acquaintances,
canceling a Facebook friendship is the equivalent of a cold shoulder; and for some members of my own family, ending Facebook friendships is the only way to avoid Thanksgiving arguments over politically opposite siblings who speak rather candidly on their platforms via Facebook. Even if you don’t participate in any activities deemed unsavory to society, Facebook can reveal things about your personal views that may have previously been reserved for conversations with closer companions.

On the brighter side of things, sharing content has provided us with a wealth of information and access unparalleled by the past. At the same time I might monitor Facebook to ensure my employ-ability, I can increase my networking opportunities through platforms such as LinkedIn, a networking site for classmates and colleagues, featuring spaces for your job history, resume, CV and job postings. The attention the Web can elicit has made it harder for cruel hazing techniques to persist for high school and college students. A 2006 USA Today article cites numerous incidents in which parties hazing fellow classmates were removed from club participation because their behavior was revealed on Facebook. These consequences are scary for those participating in hazing, and it helps schools and communities take a stand against potentially degrading and inhumane practices. Facebook also provides a space to voice your stance against bullying and hazing, making it a popular rallying ground for positive social change. Organizations can raise money and compete for grants through Facebook, as evidenced in the 2010 “Chase Community Giving” competition, in which nonprofit organizations competed through Facebook votes to win a portion of $5 million.

Whether it be for good or for worse, the reality is that using social media broadcasts elements of your life that may have been completely private 20 years ago. People gathered in physical groups to look at photos on a projector or in a scrapbook—that required plans, expensive capture and development equipment, and usually a host willing to make snacks. In 2010, we don’t have to get together to share these memories; we may even forget those we “friended” years ago who still have access to our photos. It can be unnerving to imagine an acquaintance you haven’t spoken with in a very long time looking at photos of your vacation. It also could be a blessing to share your special occasions with people who are many miles away and don’t have the opportunity to join you in person.

Regardless, we are at a point where knowing what is available about you and knowing how to control that information is critical. In The Trinity River Plays, Jasmine and Iris share a bottle of J&B, bought by Jack despite his being underage. It was a quiet and secret act among cousins, but the same activities today might be captured on digital camera and shared with an entire social network. It was very cool to hang out with my friend in a 6-foot-tall, full-body gopher costume, but relaying the details at the next family holiday was simply awkward. It is vital that we all be aware of our online presence, and try our hardest to promote our positive accolades through the Web while minimizing questionable ones.
Insects in Folklore
BY WILLIAM LANDON

Growing up, we were all the captive audiences of strange facts about insects and arachnids. How many times can a bee sting you? How much weight can an ant lift? How many spiders does the average person accidentally swallow in a year while sleeping? Why are moths drawn to flame? Maybe you would see these questions differently if you believed these bugs were sacred. Whether you believe the stories, insects have always played a large role in the folklore and myths of America.

One of the central images of The Trinity River Plays is the cicada. Iris Spears identifies herself with the insect, and the first play is entitled Jar Fly. The name “jar fly” refers to female cicadas, probably termed such because of the loud, jarring sound they make. The nickname was something Iris grew up with, a regional term. But why focus on the cicada? What makes this insect so special that Iris would feel such a kinship with it? The cicada serves as a very important structural element to the plays. The first two parts, Jar Fly and Rain, take place 17 years apart; this is the same time period as the cycle of maturation for “nymphs,” or grubs, of the North American 17-year cicada. The “year of the cicada,” which you may have experienced, is a time when these insects hatch and emerge in droves—they are plentiful all over the U.S, including both Chicago and Dallas. When we first see her, Iris is 17—an awkward girl who has probably more than once felt like these creatures, which have to push themselves up from the dirt feet first in order to make their loud sound. Rain, which takes place over 2 years, and the events of Ghoststory a year later, mark the average two year lifespan of this insect. In essence, we see Iris’ arc – from her first major catastrophe to her dealing with her mother’s death – in the lifespan of the cicada. Her poetry in Jar Fly provides the context of her understanding of these insects as symbols for her own identity.

Iris’ use of symbolism alludes to the folklore surrounding the cicada many times and touches upon themes that have been present in Chinese, Japanese and Greek folklore for a long time. The cicada is traditionally seen as a symbol of rebirth, as it sheds its shell for a new one during its lifetime (a process called metamorphosis.) But the cicada is not the only insect humans have used as metaphors as they have struggled to understand human behavior and the workings of the universe.

Long before films featured bugs as central characters, people have created stories around the lives and
identities of insects. Some insects that figure most prominently in American folklore have been flying insects such as butterflies, moths and fireflies. Insects appear in our folklore with both secular and religious meanings as well as that of other cultural traditions. For instance, insects were and are often thought of as messengers to the gods. Butterflies, bees, moths, ants, beetles and even spiders have been seen as cultural heroes and holy messengers throughout many cultures. While West African and Indian religions have recognized this, it also is important to note the history of mythological insects in Northern Native American lore and spirituality. As with cicadas, the life cycles and processes of insects have been given a spiritual context. The development of a butterfly often is seen symbolically as a transformative process.

The butterfly has been viewed as a symbol of the human soul from ancient Greece and Rome to modern-day, cultures as diverse as Japan, New Zealand, the South Pacific Islands, Asia, the Islamic world, and Madagascar. For some indigenous tribes of North America and Europe, butterfly imagery frequently serves as a representation of humans after death. Many Muslims see a moth drawn to a flame as a symbol of the human spirit overtaken by the power of God. These spiritual connections are similar in some ways to the cicada, whose metamorphosis marked it in China and other traditions as a creature symbolic of rebirth.

Ants are seen as messengers of God in parts of Africa and India. Bees also are seen to serve this purpose. Bees are respected in many faiths as well, particularly Islam, which considers them useful and pious/holy and respects their honey-making abilities. Insects also feature as central characters in Earth Diver myths—stories centered on the belief that the earth as we know it arose from a primordial ocean. These myths are part of the faiths of many in South Asia and some North American spiritual traditions (Cherokee). Often, in these tales, the beetle serves as the central figure that dove into the ocean or flew high into the sky to bring back a piece of the earth necessary for the gods to form the world. Beetles also appear as vital links between humans and the afterlife in South America, Guyana and ancient Egypt. Different kinds of beetles, from dung to scarab, are connected with the afterlife and immortality. It may seem strange at first, but countless civilizations have, like Iris, seen themselves in these flying and crawling insects.

Cicadas mating. Photo courtesy Wikimedia Commons.
When writers sit down to create characters, they often utilize archetypes, or traditional models of personality types commonly used in literature and plays and to whom an audience can immediately relate. These archetypes often are seen in film and television as well. Consider the stereotypes present in John Hughes’ Chicago-based 1985 film, *The Breakfast Club*: Claire Standish, the popular girl; John Bender, the rebel; Andy Clark, the jock; Brian Johnson, the nerd; and Allison Reynolds, the outcast. Each of us has a rough idea of what these kinds of characters look and feel like. But through character development, the writer begins to give more facets to each character so that, despite his or her archetypal outer shell, he or she becomes individualized.

The concept of archetypes may remind you of stereotypes you encounter daily in your high school. When Hughes wrote the characters listed above, he wanted his audience to instantly understand the social hierarchy and dynamic present within the detention community, as well as the generic high school community. Cliques and labels exist in the average American high school. The difference between stereotypes and archetypes is that the former is a basic generalization about a group of people, whereas the latter is a device used to render details. In other words, a stereotype masks individuality while an archetype attempts to accentuate individuality.

Television series employ ensemble archetype casts as well. Dan Harmon’s hit TV show *Community* succeeds partly because of its archetypal characters. Within the context of a community college, Harmon allows more complex and unique archetypes to shine through: Abed, the pop culture know-it-all; Shirley, the single mom; Troy, the former jock; Annie, the nerd; Jeff, the intelligent jerk; and Britta, the faux activist. As the series progresses, so does the uniqueness of the characters so that they, eventually, have transcended from archetypes to individuals.

In the opening scene of *The Trinity River Plays*, the presence of archetypes within familial context helps the audience understand the family dynamic based on Iris’ perfectionism, Jasmine’s rebellion and Daisy’s maternalism. By using the archetypes as shells, Regina Taylor adds nuances to her characters, evolving them into detailed representations of complicated humans later in the trilogy.

By the final scene in the first play of *The Trinity River Plays*, Iris, the protagonist, has transformed from her original archetype into one that is more aligned with Jasmine’s. After Iris is raped by her uncle, her out-of-character rebellious actions in the final scene of *Jar Fly* perfectly mirror Jasmine’s expected rebellion in the first scene. Taylor succeeds in portraying such a dramatic transformation by demonstrating to the audience two juxtaposing archetypes immediately, before evolving her protagonist from one extreme to the other.

Archetypes allow a collective understanding of a situation in order for an audience to connect immediately with the context. Through these archetypes, the writer can express more interesting and distinctive details so that by the time a protagonist reaches full development, the audience feels a stronger bond to the character.
What should I wear?

Definitely dress nicely but comfortably; try business casual. No tank tops, ripped jeans, etc. Baseball caps or hats must be moved once you enter the theatre. The Goodman is air-conditioned so be sure to bring an extra sweater or dress warmly.

What should I bring?

Only what you really need. Electronic devices such as PSP, Nintendo DS, smart phones, and laser pointers are not permitted during the show. If it makes noise or is distracting, please refrain from having it out in the theatre. A purse, bag, or backpack is fine. School supplies are not necessary. Remember that you are here to sit back, watch and enjoy, so don’t bring anything you don’t need.

(Please remember):

No smoking, and no eating or drinking while inside the theatre.

What if I need to leave the theatre during the show?

Only if it is an emergency. Otherwise, it’s very disrespectful. Make sure to use restrooms before the show, or wait until intermission.

Have respect for other audience members. This means no talking during the performance, no feet on seats, and no kicking.

(For your safety and others!)
How should I respond to what’s going on on the stage?

Honestly but appropriately. If you find something funny, then laugh—but don’t laugh for five minutes straight or laugh so hard that you need to leave the theatre. Theatre is very different from watching a movie at home. Always remember that you are in a room full of people who are there to watch the performance. They can hear your responses just as well as you can hear theirs. Most important, the actors can hear and see you. They will appreciate any appropriate feed back but might be extremely offended if it is inappropriate. Whether you enjoy the play or not, you owe respect to the actors for having given it a try.

What to do during Intermission:

Most plays have a 15 minute intermission. This gives you time to stretch your legs, walk, use the restroom, get water and discuss the play with your friends.

We do ask that if you are sitting on the main floor that you remain downstairs and if you are sitting in the mezzanine that you remain upstairs. There are restrooms on both floors. When intermission is over, the lights in the lobby will flash several times; that is your cue to get back to your seat because the performance is about to begin!

What to do after the show:

There will be a post-show discussion immediately following the performance. Members of the cast will come out on stage and answer your questions. Feel free to ask anything that’s on your mind about the show, but please remember to be respectful.

What to do before the show:

When your class arrives, your teacher will let the Education staff know how many people are in your group. It is a good idea to arrive at least 15-20 minutes before the performance.

If you are late, often you will not be allowed to enter the show until after intermission.

Once your group is called, an usher will lead you to your seats and hand you a program.

Please promptly sit where you have been assigned. Remember that the show needs to begin on time and everyone needs to be seated.

And remember the Golden Rule of Theatre-going:

Theatre artists are paid professionals.

When you enter a theatre, you are entering their work space. Respect their work as you would have them respect yours.

Enjoy the Show!
Reading Your Ticket

As a patron of the theatre, it is important to know how to read your ticket and find your seat. Generally, seats for all performances in the Goodman’s Albert Theatre are assigned seating, so be sure to know how to be able to find your seat. When you come with your school, you will be ushered to a section where you and your fellow students can sit and enjoy the play together.

Below is a seating chart—a map of all the seats in the Albert Theater—and an explanation of how to read your ticket. If you have any problems, ask an usher for help. They’re here for you!

Goodman’s Albert Theatre
Writing Your Response Letter

After you have seen the show and discussed your responses in the classroom, it’s time to let us know what you thought! Your response letter plays an important role at Goodman Theatre. All of the letters we receive are forwarded to our artists, and you may get a response!

Pick one of the artists involved with Candide whose work was particularly memorable to you—an actor, designer, the playwright or the director—and write that artist a letter describing your experience at the show and your feedback about his or her work. Be honest and ask any questions that are on your mind.

Send us your letter within one month of seeing the show, and we’ll forward it on to that artist!

Important information to include:
• Your name, age and school
• Your mailing address (where a response may be sent)

Here is a great student letter we received in response to Animal Crackers last season:

Dear Cast and Crew,

I would have to say that every single one of you have done a superb job in this play. All the effort you have put forth into this play has resulted in a memorable experience for all of us. I thought it was clever that the actors, actresses and the orchestra interacted with the audience. From viewing the original film of Animal Crackers, I think the cast played in the play and the original cast of Animal Crackers very similar! This play might have been the first encounter of the Marx brothers for many teenagers and children and I believe that the crew and cast of Animal Crackers proved that early comedy can also be entertaining and memorable!

The director’s vision of the play was a rather conscious one. Exposing the Marx brothers to the vast majority of people who never knew about them and bringing back nostalgic memories to the older audience was a great idea. This play was actually my first play and a first trip to Goodman Theatre. I myself, as a young adult, finally realized that plays are enjoyable and gratifying. The play had all the elements of emotion and slapstick comedy which made it a great one. The technical aspects as well as the props were amazingly set to follow each scene. My favorite scene had to be the scene where Harpo and Rivelli tried to clear up the misunderstanding of “The Flash.” I though the script was very flowing and comfortable. Was there any improv involved? I did not find any negative aspects of this play. I have found the play and the ambiance of Goodman Theatre very positive. I give Animal Crackers two thumbs up.

Sincerely,
A CPS student

Send your letters to:
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Goodman Theatre’s Education & Community Engagement is also online! Check us out on Facebook:
http://www.facebook.com/goodmaned
Or Twitter:
http://twitter.com/GoodmanEd
Or on our blog at:
http://education.goodmantheatre.org/blog/

We love hearing your thoughts, so don’t be afraid to drop us a line, comment, tag us in a note, @reply, or retweet us. Also check out our online educational resources for more information regarding the play you’ve seen, or anything else you’d like to know about how our programs (and theatre!) work.

Keep checking in for updates!