

World Premiere Musical

Study Guide: Students & Educators

THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES

Book by **Lynn Nottage**

Music by **Duncan Sheik**

Lyrics by **Susan Birkenhead**

Based on the Novel by

Sue Monk Kidd

Directed by **Sam Gold**



Madonna painting by Gail Stoughton



Heather Baird
Director of Education

Fran Tarr
Education Coordinator

Tyler Easter
Education Associate

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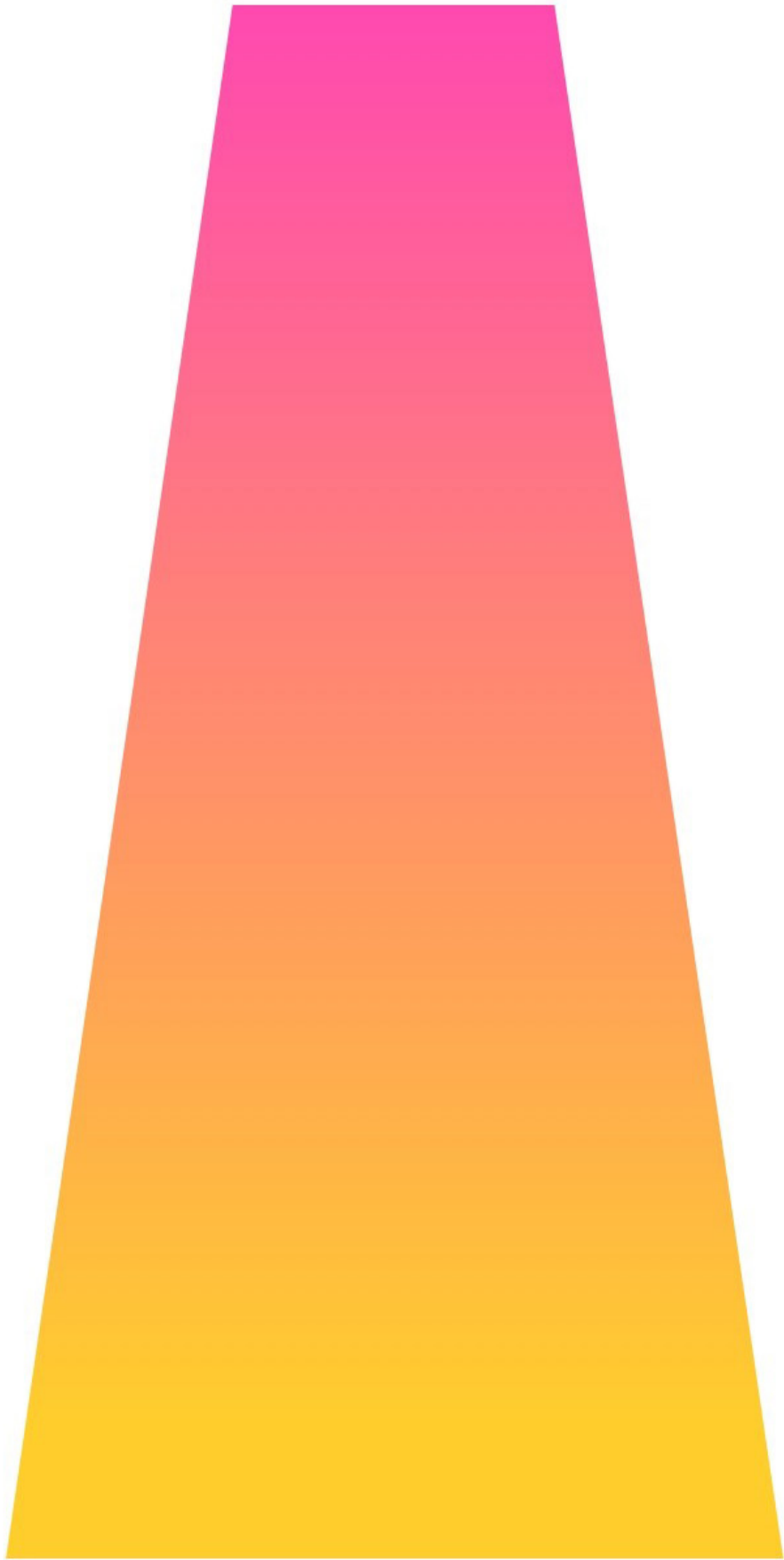
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SYNOPSIS

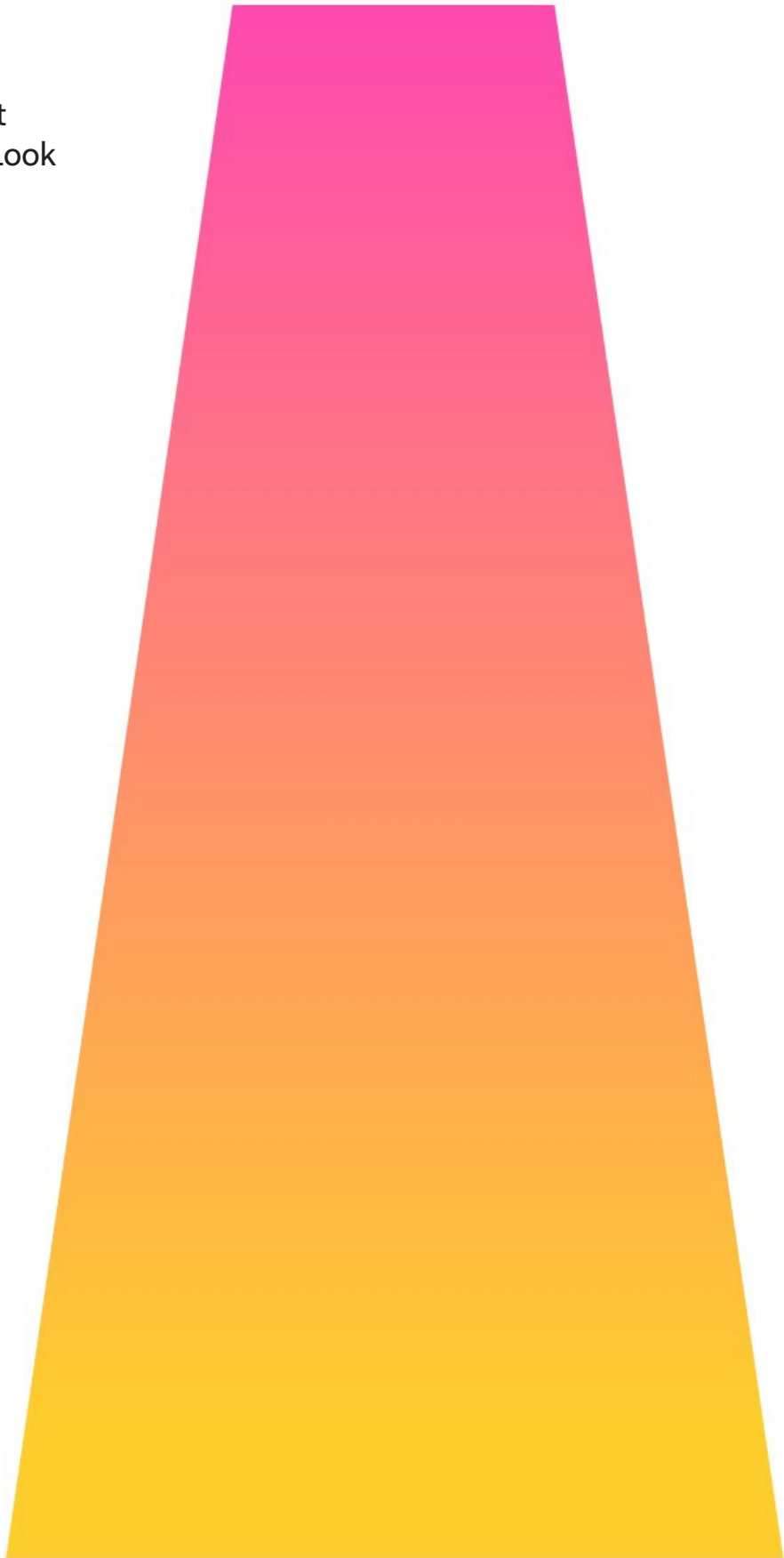
South Carolina, 1964. Lily Owens, a restless white teenager, struggles with her merciless father and the haunting memory of her mother's death. When Rosaleen, her black caregiver, is beaten and jailed for asserting her right to vote, Lily's rebellious spirit is ignited. She and Rosaleen escape on an adventure where they are taken in by a trio of black beekeeping sisters. While Lily tries to unlock the secrets of her past, she and Rosaleen find solace in the mesmerizing world of bees and spirituality in this extraordinary tale of awakening, fellowship and healing.

THEMES

- Coming of age
- Search for identity
- Racism, discrimination, bigotry, prejudice (race in America/civil rights)
- Community
- Relationships with parents
- Mothers and daughters
- Resilience of the human spirit
- Storytelling/Ceremony/Ritual

Section II:
Creative Team

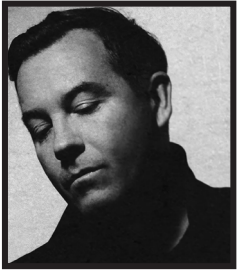
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CREATIVE BIOGRAPHIES



LYNN NOTTAGE (*Book*). Plays include *Mlima's Tale*; *Sweat* (Pulitzer Prize, Obie, Susan Smith Blackburn Prize); *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* (Lilly Award); *Ruined* (Pulitzer Prize, Obie, Lortel, NY Drama Critics' Circle, AUDELCO, Drama Desk and OCC awards); *Intimate Apparel* (American Theatre Critics and NYDCC awards). Film/TV: "She's Gotta Have It" (producer/director). Awards/recognitions: "Mimi" Steinberg Prize, PEN/Laura Pels Master Dramatist Award, Doris Duke Artist Award, American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship, National Black Theatre Fest's August Wilson Playwriting Award, Guggenheim Grant, Lucille Lortel Fellowship, Associate Professor at Columbia School of the Arts. Member of the Dramatists Guild.



DUNCAN SHEIK (*Music*). Performer/Composer. Theater credits include: *Spring Awakening* (2006) Tony Awards for Best Original Score and Best Orchestrations, 2008 Grammy Award for Best Musical Show Album; *Because of Winn-Dixie* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival 2017, Delaware Theatre Company 2015); *Whisper House* (London 2017, Old Globe Theater 2011), *American Psycho* (2016), *Alice by Heart* (upcoming 2018), *Nero* (Another Golden Rome) (currently in development), *The Nightingale* (currently in development), *Noir* (currently in development). Recordings include; *American Psycho* (Original London Cast Recording 2016), *Ledgermain* (2015), *Covers 80s* (Sneaky Records 2011), *Whisper House* (Sony 2009), *Spring Awakening* (Original Broadway Cast Recording) (2006), *White Limousine* (Rounder 2006), *Daylight* (Atlantic Records 2002), *Phantom Moon* (Nonesuch 2001), *Humming* (Atlantic Records 1998), *Duncan Sheik* (Grammy Nomination for "Best Male Vocal," RIAA Certified Gold Atlantic Records, 1996).



SUSAN BIRKENHEAD (*Lyrics*). Susan Birkenhead received a Tony Nomination, a Grammy nomination and a Drama Desk Award for her lyrics for *Jelly's Last Jam*. She was nominated for a Drama Desk Award for *Triumph of Love*, and a Tony award for *Working*. She won an Outer Critics Circle award for *What About Luv*, and an L.A. Drama Critics Award for *Minsky's*. She wrote additional songs for *Cole Porter's High Society* for Broadway, and was one of several writers for *Stars of David* and *A My Name Is Alice* Off-Broadway. Regional credits include, *Pieces of Eight*, *Fanny Hackabout Jones*, and *Radio Girl*. She is currently working on *Black Orpheus* with Lynn Nottage and George C. Wolfe, and *Betty Boop* with Bob Martin, David Foster and Jerry Mitchell. She is a member of The Dramatists Guild, and serves on their Council and the board of The Dramatists Guild Foundation.



SAM GOLD (*Director*). is a Tony Award-winning director based in Brooklyn, NY. His Broadway credits include: *A Doll's House, Part 2* (Tony Award nomination); *The Glass Menagerie*; *Fun Home* (Tony Award); *The Real Thing*; *The Realistic Joneses*; *Picnic*; *Seminar*. Recent productions include: *Hamlet* (The Public Theater); *Othello* (New York Theatre Workshop); *The Flick* (Barrow Street Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, National Theatre; Lortel Award nomination); *The Glass Menagerie* (Toneelgroep Amsterdam); *John* (Signature Theatre; Obie Award, Lortel and Drama Desk Award nominations); *The Village Bike* (MCC); *Uncle Vanya* (Soho Repertory Theatre; Drama Desk nomination); *The Realistic Joneses* (Yale Repertory Theatre); *The Cradle Will Rock* (Encores! Off-Center); *Kin* (Playwrights Horizons); *The Big Meal* (Playwrights Horizons; Lortel); *Look Back in Anger* (Roundabout Theatre Company; Lortel nomination); *Circle Mirror Transformation* (Playwrights Horizons; Obie, Drama Desk nomination); *The Aliens* (Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre; Obie Award). Training: The Juilliard School.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



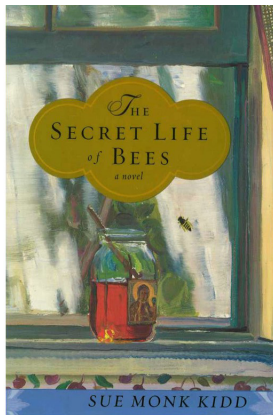
This production of *The Secret Life of Bees* is an adaptation of a New York Times Bestseller, published by Penguin in 2001. It was later adapted for the big screen in a film directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood in 2008. The film starred Queen Latifah, Jennifer Hudson, Dakota Fanning, Alicia Keys, and Sophie Okonedo.

Sue Monk Kidd was raised in the small town of Sylvester, Georgia, a place that deeply influenced the writing of her first novel *The Secret Life of Bees*. She graduated from Texas Christian University in 1970 with a degree in Nursing, working throughout her twenties as a registered nurse on surgical and pediatric hospital units, and as a college nursing instructor. She met and married Sanford Kidd, a graduate student in theology, and had two children. The pull to writing returned, and she took writing classes. She soon began a career as a freelancer, writing personal experience articles, and found immediate success. When her first novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*, was published in 2002, it became a genuine literary phenomenon, spending more than 2½ years on the New York Times bestseller list. It has been translated into 36 languages and sold more than 8 million copies worldwide. The novel is taught widely in middle school, high school, and college classrooms.

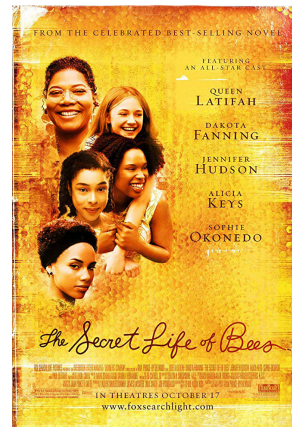
An award-winning and international bestselling author, Kidd also authored the #1 New York Times bestselling novels *The Invention of Wings* (2014) and *The Mermaid Chair* (2005), as well as several acclaimed memoirs, including *Traveling with Pomegranates* (with her daughter Ann Kidd Taylor) and *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*.

Kidd serves on the Writers Council for Poets & Writers, Inc. She lives in North Carolina with her husband, Sandy, and dog, Barney.

Text adapted from www.suemonkkidd.com and A TEACHER'S GUIDE to *The Secret Life of Bees* PENGUIN GROUP USA.



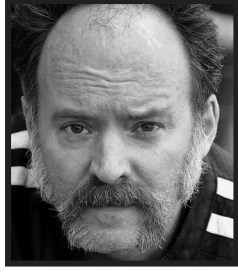
The original published book (left) and the movie poster (right).



CHARACTERS/CAST LIST



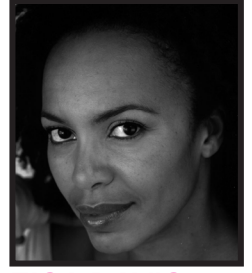
**ROMELDA TERON
BENJAMIN**
Ensemble



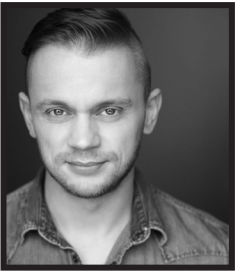
JOE CASSIDY
Ensemble



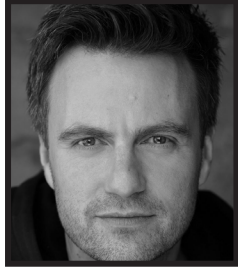
**VITA E.
CLEVELAND**
Ensemble



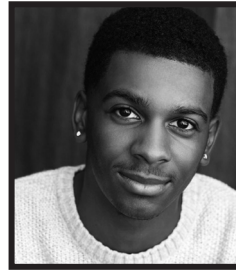
EISA DAVIS
June



MATT DEANGELIS
Ensemble



MANOEL FELCIANO
T-Ray



BRETT GRAY
Zach



JAI'LEN JOSEY
Ensemble



LACHANZE
August



**ANASTACIA
MCCLESKEY**
May



**SAYCON
SENGBLOH**
Rosaleen



**NATHANIEL
STAMPLEY**
Neil



**ELIZABETH
TEETER**
Lily

BEHIND THE SCENES LOOK AT REHEARSAL



Photos by Ahron R. Foster

Section III: Your Students As Audience

Theater Vocabulary

Key references from

The Secret Life of Bees

The Secret Life of Bees in Context

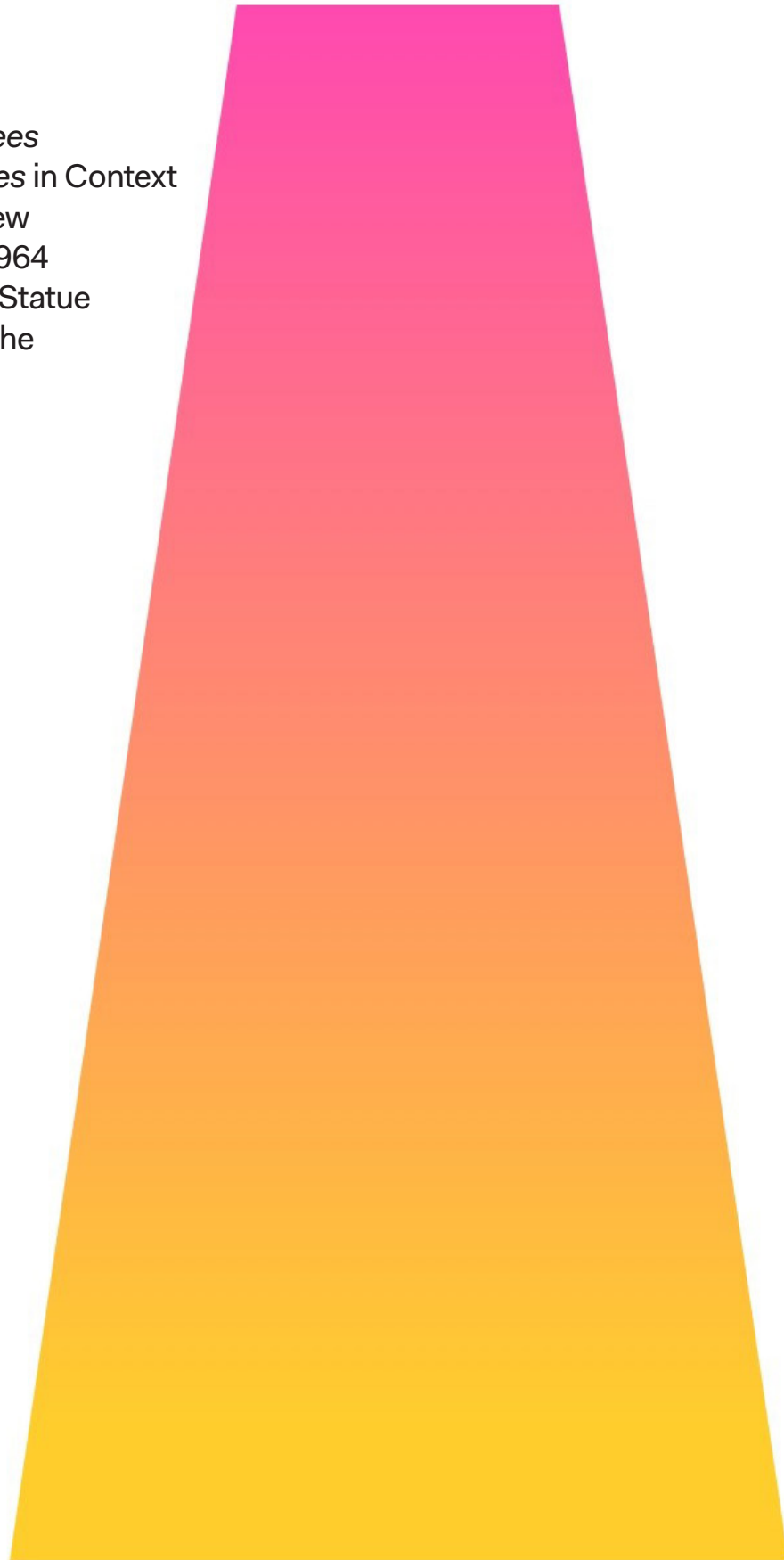
A Historical Overview

Civil Rights Act of 1964

Our Lady of Chains Statue

Race, Religion and the

Black Madonna



THEATER VOCABULARY

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To be able to discuss theater through a common, shared vocabulary.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand that the most effective way to discuss theater and new ideas is through a shared vocabulary.

ACTION: The events that move along the story of the play and which influence the characters within the play.

CHARACTERS: Individuals the audience learns about from their actions and reactions.

ENSEMBLE: A group of performers working together to create a complete production.

DIALOGUE: The exchange of speech between two characters which reveals the feelings of the character as well as the story of the play.

MONOLOGUE: A speech by one actor on stage which is intended to reveal the inner thoughts of the character the actor plays.

CHARACTER ARC: The change produced in a character by the events and other characters in the play.

MUSICAL THEATER: A twentieth century creation where writers and musicians collaborate to create a play which features song, dance and drama.

MOOD: The overall feeling the play evokes.

COSTUME: The clothes, boots, etc., worn by the actors based on their character.

PROP: Objects used by an actor to enhance their character. For example, wine glasses at a bar for drinks.

SET: The constructed environment of a play within which the action takes place.

SOUND: Noises and music used in the play.

KEY REFERENCES FROM *THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES*

“CIVIL RIGHTS BILL” refers to the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, which ended segregation in public places and banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin, is considered one of the crowning legislative achievements of the Civil Rights Movement.



FORD FAIRLAINE: The Ford Fairlane is an automobile model that was sold between 1955 and 1970 by Ford in North America. The name is derived from Henry Ford's estate, Fair Lane, near Dearborn, Michigan.

LAZARUS: The raising of Lazarus, which is referenced here, is a Biblical miracle from the Gospel of John, in which Jesus brings Lazarus of Bethany back to life four days after his burial.

MADONNA: Madonna, in Christian art, is a depiction of the Virgin Mary. The Black Madonna (The Black Virgin), significant to *The Secret Life of Bees*, is a depiction of the Virgin Mary in which she is depicted with black or dark skin. There are many examples of The Black Madonna throughout history.

MELANCHOLY: Sadness that lasts for a long period of time, often without any obvious reason

OPRY: A reference to the Grand Ole Opry. A week showcase in Nashville, TN, dedicated to honoring country music's rich history and dynamic present. The Grand Ole Opry showcases a mix of country legends and the contemporary chart-toppers who have followed in their footsteps.

OUR LADY OF CHAINS: The statue of Mary (Madonna) in *The Secret Life of Bees* is called “Our Lady of Chains.” It is symbolic on two levels. On one level, it is an obvious representation of The Blessed Mother, an important Catholic icon. In this sense, the women are not praying to the actual statue, but to whom it represents. On another level, this statue (or Mary) represents all women's need for a mother—for guidance and strength. Our Lady of Chains is mother and queen to the women in the novel. Mary is frequently called “The Queen of Heaven” and as their “queen,” Mary provides a guiding force for the women. As August tells Lily, Mary is also a source of strength, which can be found within.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: LBJ was the 36th president of the United States. He served as Vice President to John F. Kennedy and assumed the presidency after his assassination in 1963. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law by LBJ. He is remembered for that, for his “Great Society” social service programs and for expanding U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.



SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS: The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a Millennialist Protestant Christian denomination that was founded in the 1860s in the USA. Adventists live modest lives, with a strict code of ethics.

THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES IN CONTEXT

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

From A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO *The Secret Life of Bees*, PENGUIN GROUP (USA)

The Secret Life of Bees is set against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement in the tumultuous summer of 1964. Minority groups in America, especially blacks (African-Americans), believed they were being denied the basic human rights provided for other American citizens (namely, whites) by the U.S. Constitution, through the legacy of slavery and racism that accompanied the formation of this country. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 fueled fears that the civil rights work he initiated for American minorities would be lost. Yet in his first address to Congress, Lyndon Baines Johnson, the new President, urged for the passage of a civil rights bill that would further the progress made under Kennedy.

The original purpose of the congressional bill, which became law as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was to provide protection for black men from discrimination based upon race, and was expanded to protect women from discrimination as well. Under this act, racial segregation and the infamous “Jim Crow” laws were declared abolished.

When the Civil Rights Act passed, as illustrated in the story, many whites were angered by it, and continued to treat African-Americans cruelly. Despite the action and progress addressed in the new laws, racial tensions mounted. Racism persists as a deep root in American society, despite political movements and social change.



Other events make the 60s a compelling time in American history. The escalation of and subsequent protests against the Vietnam War; the continuation of the Cold War, manifested through the race to conquer space; and the changes in popular culture—rock and roll, the sexual revolution and the overall antiestablishment atmosphere—contributed to this volatile period.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

FROM HISTORY.COM

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ended segregation in public places and banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin, is considered one of the crowning legislative achievements of the civil rights movement. First proposed by President John F. Kennedy, it survived strong opposition from southern members of Congress and was then signed into law by Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson. In subsequent years, Congress expanded the act and passed additional civil rights legislation such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Lead-up to the Civil Rights Act

Following the Civil War, a trio of constitutional amendments abolished slavery, made the former slaves citizens and gave all men the right to vote regardless of race.

Nonetheless, many states—particularly in the South—used poll taxes, literacy tests and other measures to keep their African-American citizens essentially disenfranchised. They also enforced strict segregation through “Jim Crow” laws and condoned violence from white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan.

For decades after Reconstruction, the U.S. Congress did not pass a single civil rights act. Finally, in 1957, it established a civil rights section of the Justice Department, along with a Commission on Civil Rights to investigate discriminatory conditions.

Three years later, Congress provided for court-appointed referees to help blacks register to vote. Both of these bills were strongly watered down to overcome southern resistance.

When John F. Kennedy entered the White House in 1961, he initially delayed supporting new anti-discrimination measures. But with protests springing up throughout the South—including one in Birmingham, Alabama, where police brutally suppressed nonviolent demonstrators with dogs, clubs and high-pressure fire hoses—Kennedy decided to act.

In June 1963 he proposed by far the most comprehensive civil rights legislation to date, saying the United States “will not be fully free until all of its citizens are free.”

CIVIL RIGHTS ACT MOVES THROUGH CONGRESS

Kennedy was assassinated that November in Dallas, after which new President Lyndon B. Johnson immediately took up the cause.



“Let this session of Congress be known as the session which did more for civil rights than the last hundred sessions combined,” Johnson said in his first State of the Union address. During debate on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, southerners argued, among other things, that the bill unconstitutionally usurped individual liberties and states’ rights.

In a mischievous attempt to sabotage the bill, a Virginia segregationist introduced an amendment to ban employment discrimination against women. That one passed, whereas over 100 other hostile amendments were defeated. In the end, the House approved the bill with bipartisan support by a vote of 290-130.



The bill then moved to the U.S. Senate, where southern and border state Democrats staged a 75-day filibuster—among the longest in U.S. history. On one occasion, Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia, a former Ku Klux Klan member, spoke for over 14 consecutive hours.

But with the help of behind-the-scenes horse-trading, the bill's supporters eventually obtained the two-thirds votes necessary to end debate. One of those votes came from California Senator Clair Engle, who, though too sick to speak, signaled “aye” by pointing to his own eye. Having broken the filibuster, the Senate voted 73-27 in favor of the bill, and Johnson signed it into law on July 2, 1964. “It is an important gain, but I think we

just delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come,” Johnson, a Democrat, purportedly told an aide later that day in a prediction that would largely come true.

Did you know? President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with at least 75 pens, which he handed out to congressional supporters of the bill such as Hubert Humphrey and Everett Dirksen and to civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Roy Wilkins.

WHAT IS THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT?

Under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, segregation on the grounds of race, religion or national origin was banned at all places of public accommodation, including courthouses, parks, restaurants, theaters, sports arenas and hotels. No longer could blacks and other minorities be denied service simply based on the color of their skin.

The act also barred race, religious, national origin and gender discrimination by employers and labor unions, and created an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission with the power to file lawsuits on behalf of aggrieved workers.

Additionally, the act forbade the use of federal funds for any discriminatory program, authorized the Office of Education (now the Department of Education) to assist with school desegregation, gave extra clout to the Commission on Civil Rights and prohibited the unequal application of voting requirements.

LEGACY OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. said that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was nothing less than a “second emancipation.”

The Civil Rights Act was later expanded to bring disabled Americans, the elderly and women in collegiate athletics under its umbrella.

It also paved the way for two major follow-up laws: the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prohibited literacy tests and other discriminatory voting practices, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which banned discrimination in the sale, rental and financing of property. Though the struggle against racism would continue, legal segregation had been brought to its knees in the United States.

OUR LADY OF CHAINS STATUE

From A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO *The Secret Life of Bees*, PENGUIN GROUP (USA)

The statue of Mary is symbolic on two levels. On one level, it is an obvious representation of The Blessed Mother, an important Catholic icon. In this sense, the women are not praying to the actual statue, but to whom it represents. On another level, this statue (or Mary) represents all women's need for a mother—for guidance and strength. Our Lady of Chains is mother and queen to the women in the novel.

Mary is frequently called “The Queen of Heaven” and as their “queen,” Mary provides a guiding force for the women.



Our Lady of Chains as captured from the film adaptation of *The Secret Life of Bees*.

RACE, RELIGION & THE BLACK MADONNA

FROM THE WELLCOME COLLECTION:

The Wellcome Collection is a museum and library in London, displaying a mixture of medical artefacts and original artworks exploring “ideas about the connections between medicine, life and art.”

Found in hundreds of Catholic churches across Europe and Latin America, the Black Madonna, a depiction of the Virgin Mary with dark skin, remains one of the most mysterious and controversial religious icons. She has a complex history and many possible meanings.

BY DANIELA VASCO, 14 MARCH 2018

Of our own Black Madonna displayed in Medicine Man we know little, except that she was bought by Henry Wellcome and represents the original Our Virgin of Guadalupe found in the Extremadura region of Spain. But the painting incites much interest and surprise among our visitors, as it's often the first one of its kind they have encountered. This was also the case for me. I remember hearing about the Black Madonna as a child, but I can't recall ever having seen one. I grew up in a Catholic country, but was not raised in the religion.

It was later, during my degree, that I became interested in religious iconography from an art history perspective (although study of the Black Madonna was not part of the curriculum, and representations of her were never mentioned). Black Madonna images, dating mostly from the medieval period, appear in the form of paintings and sculptures carved out of wood and stone. The oldest examples, and the great majority of them, are found in European countries. They are often in the most venerated shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary and have attracted thousands of pilgrims for centuries.

THE BLACK MADONNA OF CZĘSTOCHOWA AND MONTSERRAT

Among the most well known are Our Lady of Częstochowa in Poland and Our Lady of Montserrat in Catalonia. In these locations, their meaning and significance go beyond religion. They are also powerful symbols of national identity.

Most of us are familiar with depictions of the Virgin Mary as fair-skinned, blue-eyed and blonde. A first encounter with a Black Madonna is intriguing. Invariably, the first question crossing most of our visitors' minds, no matter their country of origin or ethnic background, is: why is she black?

This is where the controversy begins, with conflicting views between the Church, academics and researchers. Accidental factor, biblical verse or Mother Earth?



The most commonly accepted theory deems the images' skin colour to be accidental: these Madonnas were once white, but have darkened through ageing and exposure to candle soot.

This explanation is as much anecdotal as it is a symptom of cultural whitewashing.

It is hard to believe that all these images, represented in various materials, would have aged in a particular way that capriciously turned only their faces and hands black. (The same phenomenon has not been observed in equal 16

proportion in representations of Jesus Christ.)

Another explanation associates the Black Madonna with a biblical verse, saying that it refers to the words of the Bride in the Song of Solomon: "I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem." This theory at least accepts a clear intention behind the blackness of the images.

But I, and many others, were still not convinced.

As there has always been exchange and continuity between different cultures and religious systems, I am strongly inclined to agree with historians who argue that the Black Virgin Mary is linked to ancient pre-Christian worshipping of Mother Earth and other female divinities.

These divinities are shared ancestors between her and goddesses such as Cybele, Artemis, Gaia and Isis (some of them often portrayed as black). In this case, black is not only a mystical colour associated with fertile earth, but also an expression of an ancient cultural memory that connects us back to our early history in Africa.

PRE-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

What form these ancient religions took we may never know; this is an area of much conflict and speculation. But what we can observe by looking at different religions centred on mother goddesses through the ages is that associations between motherhood, womanhood, fertility and Earth have been strong and recurrent across religions.

The most evident synthesis is the ancient Greek goddess Gaia, a female personification of Earth, creator of all life, who gives birth, nourishes and feeds us all, and to whom we shall return when we die.

These ancient religions gradually changed or disappeared as societies became structured within the patriarchal model, and religions centred on a male figure were superimposed.

But some elements still survive. The celebrations of the summer solstice, still very much alive in Eastern Europe and Scandinavia, have a direct link to pre-Christian pagan rituals. Even when we casually refer to Mother Nature, we are unconsciously echoing the same distant past.

It was certainly not unusual for Christian churches to be built over pilgrimage and worship sites, where pagan shrines and temples once stood, but the same rituals and practices continued and were absorbed by the new officially accepted faith.

This might well be the case of Our Lady of Willesden (the Black Madonna of London!). Unfortunately, the original was destroyed during the English Reformation in the 16th century. It is said to have been publicly burnt at Chelsea alongside several other Catholic images.

A couple of centuries later, two statues were made in honour of the Black Madonna of Willesden. One can be found in the Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of Willesden, and the other in the Anglican St Mary's, Willesden, on the same ground as her predecessor.

The origins of the original Black Madonna of Willesden may be lost in history, but it is believed that the site has been a centre of pilgrimage since Anglo-Saxon times, and that the water from the natural well, which still runs under the church, has holy and healing properties.

LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD

The history of the Black Madonna does not end in medieval Europe. Later, her image is again transformed, and takes on other interesting roles in the colonised Americas.

But what can she still tell us today? What significance can she have beyond religion and faith? I believe icons like the Black Madonna can do a lot for us. They can help us change the way history is told. They can speak about all the other histories that have been neglected in favour of Western, male-centric narratives we've become so used to, and in which museums are often traditionally grounded.

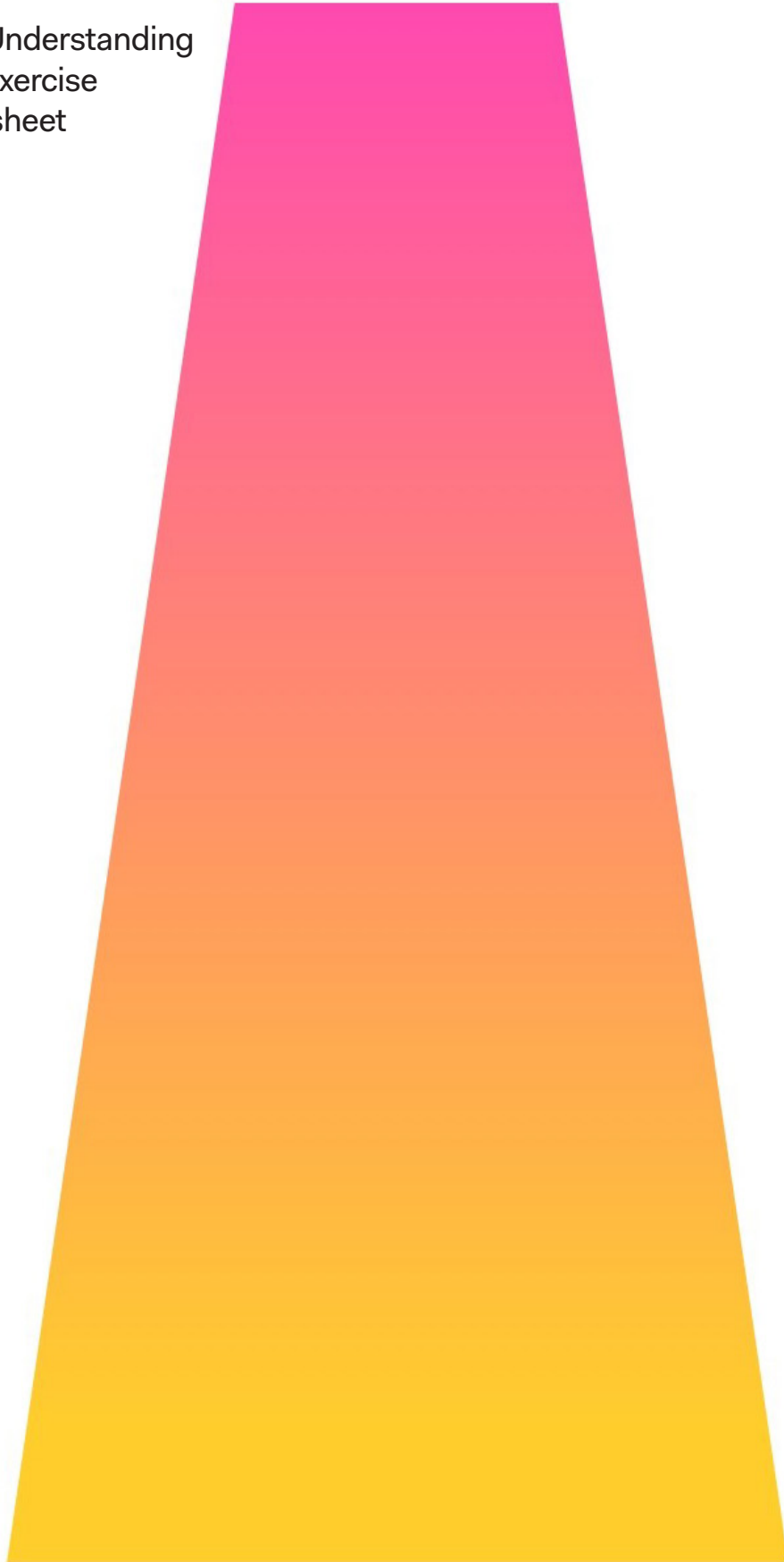
While delving in our Library archives, trying to trace back the history of our Black Madonna painting, I found that it was originally catalogued as 'Negro Madonna'. This was 1939, when the presence of examples of racially biased language, such as this one, would be the norm in museums.

In the last few decades we have seen the onset of movements calling out for the celebration of the history of marginalised groups. These movements have been crucial in encouraging museums to start the long process of admitting and questioning the problematics of their legacies. They also continue to inspire new ways of talking about the present issues in society.

The everyday conversations we have with visitors are part of this process of change. Objects like the Black Madonna make for great starting points of conversation.

Section IV: Your Students As Actors

Reading a Scene for Understanding
Practical Aesthetics Exercise
Scene Analysis Worksheet



READING A SCENE FOR UNDERSTANDING

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To introduce the Practical Aesthetics “tools” for breaking down a scene. To understand the character and the story of the scene by relating the character’s actions to the student’s own life.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand that an important part of creating a simple, honest character involves knowing what that character wants.

MATERIALS

Pens, pencils, copies of the following scene from *The Secret Life of Bees*, and copies of the Literal, Want, Action, As-If worksheet and/or Mini-Lesson.

PRACTICAL AESTHETICS EXERCISE

STEP ONE

Divide the students in pairs. Ask the students to select which character they want to portray.

STEP TWO

Allow the students time to read the scene silently to themselves.

STEP THREE

Ask the students to read the Introduction to the Practical Aesthetic Introduction (Page 18) sheet and have the students answer the four questions on the Scene Analysis Worksheet (Page 19).

NOTE: The four questions and the students’ answers to them form the basis for the Practical Aesthetics scene analysis; and enables the actor to create a simple, honest character. They’re simply being honest to their own experiences!

STEP FOUR

After the students have completed the question worksheet, ask each pair of actors to read the scene in the front of the class room for an audience. The students should incorporate the ideas from the worksheet as they read the scene.

THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES SCENE

T-RAY: COME HERE.

T-RAY (CONT'D): WHAT'S THIS?

LILY: IT WAS MAMA'S.

**T-RAY: I GAVE THAT LOCKET TO DEBORAH ON HER 23RD BIRTHDAY.
TAKE IT OFF!**

T-RAY (CONT'D): NOW!

T-RAY (CONT'D): GIVE IT HERE.

LILY: PLEASE DON'T TAKE IT!

T-RAY: GIMME!

LILY: IT WON'T KILL YOU TO LET ME HAVE A LITTLE SOMETHING OF HERS.

**T-RAY: WHEN ARE YOU GONNA LEARN? LILY, YOUR MAMA WAS CRAZY.
NO GOOD. NOW, GIMME!**

LILY: NO, IT'S MINE!

LILY (CONT'D): OW.

T-RAY: YOUR SASS JUST EARNED YOU A MEETING WITH THE MARTHA WHITES.

LILY: T-RAY! PLEASE.

T-RAY: KNEEL.

LILY: PLEASE.

LILY (CONT'D): OW!

**T-RAY: DON'T YOU EVEN THINK ABOUT GOING ANYWHERE.
YOU BEST BE RIGHT THERE WHEN I GET BACK.**

PRACTICAL AESTHETICS INTRODUCTION

ANALYSIS

Script analysis is the process of breaking down a beat within a scene. We ask four questions in order to do this.

1. What is the character literally doing?
2. What does the character want?
3. What is the essential ACTION?
4. What is that action like to me? It is AS-IF...

LITERAL: In this step, the actor determines what the character he or she is playing is literally doing according to the text.

PURPOSE: An actor has to travel far—think of this preparation as the road map.

WANT: In this step, the actor identifies the goal of the character in the scene, specifically what the character wants from the other character/s in the scene. The given circumstances of the story inform the WANT.

PURPOSE: To focus the actor on the characters' interaction.

ACTION: Playing an ACTION is the physical pursuit of a goal. Defining the ACTION of the scene allows the actor to determine what result or CAP he or she is looking for from the other actor/s in the scene.

EXAMPLES:

- Put someone in their place | • Beg someone for forgiveness. | • Get a favor.
- Get someone to let me off the hook. | • Force someone to face the facts.
- Inspire someone to greatness. | • Get someone to see the light.

PURPOSE: Using an action gives the actor a task and a specific point of view. The Atlantic Theater Company teaches that the Action creates character.

AS-IF: In this step, the actor personalizes the action by finding a real-life situation in which they would behave according to the action they have chosen for the scene.

EXAMPLE: Get a favor.

It's AS-IF I forgot to do my science homework and I'm asking my teacher for an extra day to hand it in.

PURPOSE: To gain personal insight and urgency to the scene or beat.

TACTICS & TOOLS: Different ways an actor goes about getting his action.

EXAMPLE: Plead, flirt, demand, inspire, challenge, level, threaten.

LIVING IN THE MOMENT. Reacting impulsively to what the other actor in the scene is doing, from the point of view of the chosen action.

SCENE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Here are your “tools” for understanding your character:

IF YOU'RE PLAYING T-RAY...

What is my character literally doing?

T-Ray is demanding that Lily stop wearing her mother's locket because she was no good so there's nothing to learn from her.

What does my character want?

T-Ray wants Lily to throw the locket and memory of her mother away.

What is the action I'm going to play?

To lay down the law.

The As-If...

You are telling your younger sibling they have no right to be invading your privacy by going into your bedroom.

IF YOU'RE PLAYING LILY...

Lily is telling T-Ray she deserves to keep her Mama's locket because she doesn't have anything else of hers.

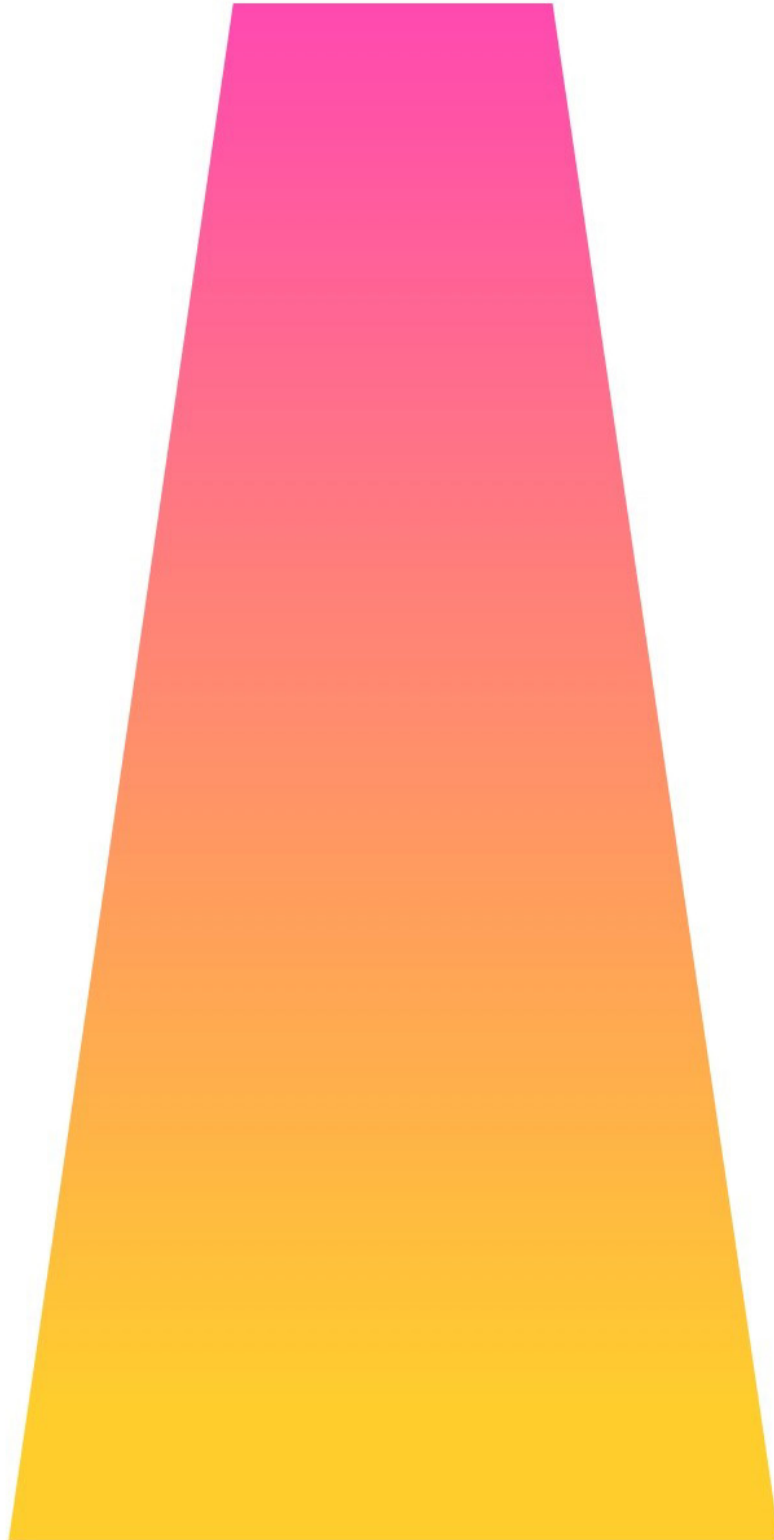
Lily wants T-Ray to let her keep the locket she feels is rightfully hers.

To get my due.

You are confronting a teacher who has given you an unfair grade on a paper about why you deserve a higher grade.

Section V: Your Students As Artists

Post Theater Creative
Response Activity
Developing A Personal
Creative Response
Common Core & DOE Theater
Blueprint
Sources



POST THEATER CREATIVE RESPONSE ACTIVITY:

Developing A Personal Creative Response

Activity I

Teacher Objective: To develop critical thinking skills through examining a theme in *The Secret Life of Bees* and relating that theme to an individual creative response.

Student Goal: To understand that an important theme from *The Secret Life of Bees* portrays the truths and messages of the play.

Materials: Pencils, pens, and writing paper.

Step one: Discuss the impact each character's search for identity plays in *The Secret Life of Bees*.

Step Two: Ask the students to collaborate in pairs. Each student should select a character from the play. Partners should select different characters.

Step Three: Ask the students to write a letter from the POV (point of view) of their character to their future-self. This letter will reflect the hopes and dreams of their character twenty-years after the events of the play. Allow 7-minutes for this free write.

Step Four: Ask the students to switch their letters with their partner.

Step Five: Ask each student to write a response to the letter they've received. They should reflect on the hopes and dreams their partner has written about from the perspective of twenty years in the future. Did they succeed? Fail? Allow 7-minutes for this free write.

Step Six: Ask the students to share their writings, offering positive feedback after each share.

POST THEATER CREATIVE RESPONSE ACTIVITY:

DEVELOPING A PERSONAL CREATIVE RESPONSE

ACTIVITY II

Teacher Objective: To help students develop critical thinking skills through examining a personal narrative in *The Secret Life of Bees* and create a personal creative response.

Student Goal: To understand that a personal narrative from *The Secret Life of Bees* portrays the truth and message of the play.

Materials: Pencils, pens, writing paper, chalkboard.

Step one: Ask a student to create a list of their own personal treasures similar to the contents of Lily's treasure box.

Step Two: Ask each student to create a story, poem, or song that resonates why these items are significant to them. NOTE: Allow 7-minutes for this free write.

Step Three: Ask the students to share their writings, offering positive feedback after each share.

COMMON CORE & DOE THEATER BLUEPRINT

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

Theater is often a reflection of history and culture and can be used to enlighten an audience about a shared cultural or historical experience.

Cultural and historical research can support the artistic choices the designers of a production use in creating a piece of theater.

Theater conveys the meaning behind an individual's struggle to have his or her life or life choices validated by family, friends, community, and the broader world.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Do the direction and staging reinforce the theme of "search for identity" which is of major significance in *The Secret Life of Bees*?

Do you accept the concept put forward in *The Secret Life of Bees* that ritual and community are essential to personal identity?

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Additional Research and Content by Allison Miller & Christina Kroell.

STRAND BENCHMARKS

THEATER MAKING: ACTING

Benchmark: Students increase their ability as imaginative actors while continuing to participate as collaborative ensemble members. Students demonstrate the ability to reflect on and think critically about their own work.

THEATER MAKING: PLAYWRITING/PLAY MAKING

Benchmark: Students refine their ability as playwrights to express point of view and personal vision.

DEVELOPING THEATER LITERACY

Benchmark: Students develop skills as critics by analyzing the critical writings of others.

MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH THEATER

Benchmark: Students demonstrate a capacity for deep personal connection to theater and a realization of the meaning and messages of theater.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Benchmark: Students invigorate and broaden their understanding of theater through collaborative partnerships with theater professionals.

Section VI:

The Atlantic Legacy

Atlantic Theater Company & Atlantic Acting School

FOUNDED as an ensemble of impassioned student artists in 1985, Atlantic Theater Company has grown into a powerhouse off-Broadway company. We challenge, inspire, and awaken audiences with truthful storytelling presented across our two venues, the Linda Gross Theater and the intimate Stage 2 black-box. As a producer of compelling new works, we are committed to championing the stories from new and established artists alike, amplifying the voices of emerging playwrights through our deeply collaborative programs and initiatives.

AT ATLANTIC, our aim is singular—to empower simple and honest storytelling that fosters greater understanding of our shared world. We are a family of artists dedicated to exploring essential truths onstage, be it a show at Atlantic Theater Company or a class at Atlantic Acting School. As a producer, presenter, and educator of theater, we are driven by the belief that theater can challenge and transform our ways of thinking and urge us to reflect on our role in society. From our Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning productions to our community-based education programs, we are committed to uncovering and celebrating the stories of our varied human existence.

AT ATLANTIC ACTING SCHOOL, we equip our students with the physical, emotional, and tactical tools of acting to discover their truths, and prepare them for success beyond our doors. From our full-time and evening conservatories to our NYU Tisch studio, and our after-school and summer programs for kids and teens, our immersive, learn-by-doing approach is central to an Atlantic Acting education. We have mentored and trained outstanding artists for more than 30 years. No matter their age or background, our students learn to break through their creative comfort zones in service to bringing essential human stories to life.



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