

Study Guide: Students & Educators

CLOUD NINE

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ATLANTIC THEATER COMPANY

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Section 1:
The Play
Synopsis,
Characters,
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SYNOPSIS

Set in colonial Africa and 1979 London, this landmark play is about power, politics, family, Queen Victoria, and sex. A timeless and biting funny modern classic, *Cloud Nine* has not been seen in a major New York production since 1981; when it ran for over two years.

Cloud Nine is a hysterical, in-your-face, energetic, and occasionally dark play that confronts traditional ideas of gender, sexuality, and patriarchy. Act one begins in Africa under British Imperialist rule in 1879 where we first meet Clive, a domineering husband, father, and master. Through his heavy handed approach in his many roles, Clive is both a literal and a metaphorical representative of the British Empire's intent to "civilize" the natives through his treatment of his subservient family. His wife, Betty, is played by a man. His son, Edward, is played by a woman. His servant, Joshua, is an African native, but is played by a Caucasian actor. These casting choices create a visual analogy to challenge the conventions of the time and to reveal underlying truths about each character. As each actor is introduced they quickly betray their customary roles and expose how tradition and convention can impact the individual and their contributions to the society they must operate within.

Act Two opens in 1979 London, which seems to be an alternate universe operating within a very different set of societal norms. While not as dictatorial a society at first glance, the characters must still navigate the aftermath of the dark, patriarchal, sexually oppressive world from which they come. Continuing in the style of shifted conventions, despite nearly 100 years passing from Act I to Act II, the characters have only aged 25 years. Throughout Act II, we observe the characters challenging their own ideas of social mores, examining the relationships in their lives, and searching for acceptance both inside themselves, and in society.

SETTING

Act One

A British Colony In Africa; 1879.

Act Two

London; 1979.

CHARACTERS

Clive

Colonial Aristocrat, Father, And Husband

Betty

Clive's Wife

Edward

Clive's Son

Victoria

Clive's Daughter

Harry Bagley

An Explorer

Mrs. Saunders

A Widow

Lin

A Lesbian

Martin

Victoria's Husband

Ellen

Edward's Governess

Gerry

Edward's Lover

Cathy

Lin's Young Daughter

Maud

Clive's Mother-In-Law

Joshua

Clive's African Servant,
Played By A Caucasian Actor

Section 2:
Cast & Creative
Director And
Cast Bios





CARYL CHURCHILL
Playwright

Stage plays include: *Owners* (Royal Court Upstairs, London and New York Theatre Workshop); *Objections to Sex and Violence* (Royal Court); *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (Joint Stock UK tour, Royal Court Upstairs); *Vinegar Tom* (Monstrous Regiment, UK tour); *Traps* (Royal Court Upstairs and New York Theatre Workshop); *Cloud Nine* (Joint Stock UK tour–Royal Court and Atlantic Theater, New York); *Three More Sleepless Nights* (Soho Poly and Royal Court Upstairs); *Top Girls* (Royal Court and The Public Theater, New York); *Fen* (Joint Stock UK tour–Almeida Theatre and Royal Court and The Public Theater); *Soft-cops* (RSC at the Pit); *A Mouthful of Birds with David Lan* (Joint Stock UK tour–Royal Court); *Serious Money* (Royal Court and Wyndham’s Theatre and the Public Theater); *Icecream* (Royal Court and Public Theater); *Mad Forest* (Central School of Speech and Drama, the Royal Court, and New York Theatre Workshop); *Lives of the Great Poisoners with Orlando Gough and Ian Spink* (Second Stride UK tour and Riverside Studios, London); *The Skriker* (National Theatre, London, and Public Theater); *Thyestes trans. from Seneca* (Royal Court Upstairs); *Hotel* with Orlando Gough and Ian Spink (Second Stride, UK tour and The Place, London); *This is a Chair* (London International Festival of Theatre at the Royal Court); *Blue Heart* (Joint Stock, UK tour, Royal Court and BAM); *Far Away* (Royal Court Upstairs and the Albery Theatre, London and New York Theatre Workshop); *A Number* (Royal Court Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop); a new version of Strindberg’s *A Dream Play* (National Theatre); *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* (Royal Court and Public Theater); *Bliss* translation of Olivier Choinière’s play (Royal Court); *Seven Jewish Children* (Royal Court and New York Theatre Workshop); *A Ring A Lamp A Thing an opera with Orlando Gough* (Linbury Studio, Royal Opera House); *Love and Information* (Royal Court and New York Theatre Workshop) and *Ding Dong the Wicked* (Royal Court).

JAMES MACDONALD
Director

Received an Obie Award last season for *Love and Information*, which played to rave reviews at New York Theatre Workshop; the London production of this play garnered a nomination for the Evening Standard’s Award for Best Director. James’s production of *Cock* at the Royal Court received the 2010 Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre, before transferring to New York, where James was nominated for the 2013 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Director. Also in New York, James has directed acclaimed productions of *King Lear*, *Book of Grace*, *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* (The Public Theater), *John Gabriel Borkman* (BAM/Abbey Theatre), *Top Girls* (MTC/Broadway), *Dying City* (Lincoln Center), *A Number* (New York Theatre Workshop) and *4.48 Psychosis* (St. Ann’s Warehouse). Recent London credits include *The Wolf from the Door*, *Circle Mirror Transformation* (Royal Court), *The Father* (Theatre Royal Bath/The Tricycle), *Roots* (Donmar), *#AIWW–The Arrest of Ai Weiwei* (Hampstead), *A Delicate Balance*, *Judgment Day* (Almeida), *Dido Queen of Carthage*, *The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other*, *Exiles* (National Theatre), and *Glengarry Glen Ross* (West End). From 1992 to 2006, Macdonald was associate director of the Royal Court, where he directed world premieres of work by writers including Caryl Churchill, Sarah Kane, Martin Crimp and Christopher Shinn. He also directed the film version of Caryl Churchill’s *A Number*, featuring Tom Wilkinson and Rhys Ifans, for HBO. This summer, James will direct the world premiere of Anne Carson’s translation of *The Bakkhai* at London’s Almeida Theatre.



BROOKE BLOOM
(Edward / Betty)

Theatre Credits: *D Deb Debbie Deborah* at Clubbed Thumb, David Greenspan's *I'm Looking for Helen Twelvemistress* at Abrons Arts Center, *You Got Older* with Page 73, *Somewhere Fun* at Vineyard Theatre, *Lungs* at the Studio Theatre in D.C. and Barrington Stage, *Becky Shaw* at the Wilma, *The Grown-Up* at the Actors Theatre of Louisville, *Marie Antoinette* at ART, as well as *A Feminine Ending*, *Completeness* and *Hamlet* all at South Coast Rep. Film: *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, *Ceremony*, *He's Just Not That Into You*, *Gabbi on the Roof in July*, *Swim Little Fish Swim* (SXSW 2013) and *She's Lost Control* (Independent Spirit Nom. 2014, Berlinale 2014). Television: Series Regular on Amazon's "Alpha House," guest appearances on "Louie," "Person of Interest," "Law & Order," "The Good Wife," recurring role on "CSI: Miami" and various pilots for NBC and Fox. Obie recipient 2014, Drama Desk Nomination 2014. IRNE 2013 and Barrymore 2012.

SEAN DUGAN
(Joshua / Gerry)

Broadway: *Next Fall* (Drama Desk Award nomination). Off-Broadway: *The Illusion*, *Next Fall*, *The English Channel*, *Perfect Harmony*, *BFF*, *Nerds: The Musical*, *Valhalla*, *Flesh and Blood*, *Corpus Christi* and *Shakespeare's R&J*. Regional: Actors Theatre of Louisville, Chautauqua Theater Company, American Conservatory Theater, Round House Theatre, Yale Repertory Theatre, Huntington Theatre Company, The Old Globe, and American Repertory Theater. Film: *Dinner@40*, *Stephen King's A Good Marriage*, *On the Slope*, *Gigantic*, *Trust the Man*, *Company Man* and *Overnight Sensation*. Television: "The Lottery," "Smash," "Boardwalk Empire," "Blue Bloods," "Elementary," "I Just Want My Pants Back," "The Good Wife," "Fringe," "Law & Order: SVU" and "Criminal Intent" and HBO's "Oz."

LUCY OWEN
(Maud / Victoria)

Was last seen in *The Village Bike* (directed by Sam Gold) at MCC. Other theatre credits include: *Clybourne Park* at the Long Wharf Theatre, *Body Language* (Active Theatre), *Complete* (NY Fringe Encore). Regionally: Berkeley Rep (*Cloud Nine*), San Francisco Shakespeare Festival (*Henry IV, parts 1 & 2*; *Winter's Tale*), PCPA Theatrefest (*Arcadia*, *Amadeus*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Skylight*) Theatreworks in Mountainview (*Shakespeare in Hollywood*), Porchlight Theatre Co. (*The Seagull*, *An Ideal Husband*). Film/TV credits include: *The Mend* (opposite Josh Lucas), *Kelly & Cal* (with Juliette Lewis), Jonathan Demme's *Ricki and the Flash*, *Liv*, *Game for Motel Rom*, *Higher Ground*, "The Big C," "Law & Order SVU," "The Americans," "Delocated," "Inside Amy Schumer," "Alpha House," "The Good Wife," "Elementary." Lucy will next be seen as Connie on Showtime's "Billions."

CHRIS PERFETTI
(Betty / Edward)

Broadway: *Picnic* (dir. Sam Gold). Off-Broadway: *The Tempest* (Public Theatre/NYSF), *Sons of the Prophet* (Roundabout), *The Tutors* (Second Stage). Television: "Crossbones" (NBC), "Looking" (HBO), "Next Caller" (NBC). Upcoming: "Criminal Justice" (HBO). Education: B.F.A., SUNY Purchase Conservatory.



JOHN SANDERS
(Harry Bagley / Martin)

Broadway: *Matilda*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*. National tour: Black Stache in *Peter and the Starcatcher*, Sam in *Mamma Mia!*, Chicago theatre: *The Real Thing*, *A Minister's Wife* (Writers' Theatre); *Spamalot*, *Miss Saigon* (Drury Lane Oakbrook); and with Goodman, Chicago Shakespeare, Steppenwolf, Stage Left, Chicago Dramatists and other fine companies. Film: *No God, No Master*; *Alleged*. TV: "Elementary," "The Following," "Last Man Standing."

IZZIE STEELE
(Ellen / Mrs. Saunders / Lin)

Izzie Steele is London born with deep Polish roots and is thrilled to be making her Atlantic Theater Company debut. Ms. Steele was last seen in *What I Did Last Summer* Off Broadway at The Signature Theatre and recently starred as 'Marion' in the Canadian production of *The Heart of Robin Hood*. The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey has played a crucial role in her training and she has performed in such productions as *Playboy of the Western World*, *Henry V Part 1*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Taming of the Shrew*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. In addition, Ms. Steele has appeared on television and film in "Law and Order: SVU," "One Bad Choice" and "Canary" which recently premiered at the CUFF at Lincoln Center.

CLARKE THORELL
(Clive / Cathy / Soldier)

Broadway: *Annie* (Rooster Hannigan), *Hairspray* (Corny Collins), *Titanic* (Barrett, Farrell), *Mamma Mia!* (Harry Bright), *Sinatra...His Way*, *The Who's Tommy*. Off/Other: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Gus), *Juno* (Charlie), *Satellites*, *Saturday Night*, *Wise Guys*, *Lone Star Love*, *Twelfth Night* (Orsino), *Floyd Collins* (Homer). TV/Film: "House Of Cards," "30 Rock," (Meet The Woggels), "Boardwalk Empire," "The Good Wife," Men In Black III, "The Sopranos," "NYC 22," "Kings," "Rescue Me," "Law & Order," "Far East," The Winning Season.

Dane Laffrey (Set Designer)

Broadway: set & costumes for the current revival of *Spring Awakening* (Brooks Atkinson), set for *Fool For Love* (Friedman). Recent off-Broadway: set and/or costumes for *The Christians* and *lowa* (Playwrights Horizons), *Bad Jews* and *Tigers Be Still* (Roundabout), Arlington (Vineyard), *King Liz*, *American Hero*, and *The Talls* (Second Stage), *Disgraced* (Lincoln Center), *The Maids* (Red Bull), *I Remember Mama* and *The Patsy* (Transport Group), *The Few* (Rattlestick). Regional work at The Humana Festival, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Old Globe, Huntington, Goodspeed, Denver Center, Deaf West, Center Stage, Dallas Theatre Center, New York Stage and Film, The Studio, Signature, Two River, others. International work in Tokyo, Oslo, Osaka and throughout Australia. Nominations for a Drama Desk Award and 4 Henry Hewes Awards.

Scott Zielinski (Lighting Designer)

Scott has created designs for over 300 productions of theatre, dance, and opera throughout the world. He has worked extensively in New York and at most regional theaters throughout the U.S. including *TOPDOG/UNDERDOG* (Broadway), Arena Stage, Goodman Theater, Guthrie Theater, Lincoln Center Festival, Mark Taper Forum, New York Theater Workshop, The Public Theater, and Steppenwolf. Internationally he has designed in Adelaide, Amsterdam, Avignon, Berlin, Bregenz, Edinburgh, Fukuoka, Gennevilliers, Hamburg, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Linz, London, Lyon, Melbourne, Orleans, Oslo, Ottawa, Paris, Reykjavik, Rouen, St. Gallen, Singapore, Stockholm, Stuttgart, Tokyo, Toronto, Vienna, Vilnius, and Zurich. Dance and opera highlights include American Ballet Theatre, Bregenzer Festspiele, Boston Ballet, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Canadian Opera Company, CND Paris, English National Opera, Houston Ballet, Houston Grand Opera, Kennedy Center, Lithuanian National Opera, National Ballet of Canada, De Nederlandse Opera, New York City Opera, Royal Opera House, San Francisco Ballet, San Francisco Opera, and Spoleto Festival. Scottzielinski.com

Darron L West (Sound Designer)

He is a TONY and OBIE award-winning sound designer whose work for theater and dance has been heard in over 500 Productions nationally and internationally on Broadway and Off-Broadway. His many accolades for sound design include the Bay Area Theater Critics Circle Award, the Lucille Lortel and the AUDELCO. He is a two time Henry Hewes Design Award winner and a proud recipient of the 2012 Princess Grace Award Statue.

Ben Furey (Dialect Coach)

Ben is delighted to be returning to the Atlantic, having previously worked on *Our New Girl*, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, *Harper Regan*, *The New York Idea* and *Gabriel*. On Broadway, he currently works on *Curious Incident...* and *Matilda*. Previous Broadway credits include *The Last Ship*, *Gigi*, *Billy Elliot*, *Mamma Mia*, *Spamalot*, and *Side Show*. National tours include *A Gentlemen's Guide to Love and Murder*, *Matilda*, *Mamma Mia*, *Billy Elliot*, *Spamalot*, and *West Side Story*. Off-Broadway work includes productions at Roundabout Theatre Company, Manhattan Theatre Club and Signature Theatre. Regional and international coaching includes productions at The Guthrie Theater, Two River Theatre, Palm Beach\ DramaWorks, Cincinnati Playhouse, Gate Theatre (Dublin), Dallas Theater Center, and Colorado and North Carolina Shakespeare Festivals. Film and TV credits include *Treasure Buddies*, *Eyeborgs*, "Elementary" and the PBS wine show, "Vine Talk."

David H. Lurie (Stage Manager)

Atlantic: *The Collection* and *A Kind of Alaska*, *The Voyage Inheritance*. Broadway: *Speed-the-Plow* (Barrymore), *Losing Louie* (Biltmore). Touring: Ireland and US-*The Cripple of Inishmaan* (Druid and Atlantic Theater Company) and *The Silver Tassie* (Lincoln Center Festival and Druid Theatre Company). Off Broadway: Second Stage, Signature Theatre Company, Playwrights Horizons, Manhattan Theater Club, Roundabout Theatre Company, MCC Theater. Regional: American Conservatory Theater, Huntington Theatre Company, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Dallas Theater Center, Long Wharf Theatre, Lyric Stage Company of Boston. Graduate of Boston University.

AMANDA KOSACK (Assistant Stage Manager)

National Tours: *Irving Berlin's White Christmas*, *Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story*, and *Fela!* Off-Broadway: *The Way We Get By* (Second Stage), *Medieval Play*, *The Lady From Dubuque* (Signature Theatre), *In Transit* (Primary Stages). NYC: *BAM Poetry 2012 & 2014*, *An Evening of Music with Rufus & Martha Wainwright*, *Roman Tragedies* (Brooklyn Academy of Music), *Foreverman* (NYMF). Regional: Long Wharf Theatre, SurfFlight Theatre, Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma. Television: *Jimmy Kimmel Live in Brooklyn*. Amanda is a graduate of Oklahoma City University and a proud member of AEA. Love and thanks to Mom and Dad.

**Section 3:
Your Students
As Audience**

Critical Thinking
Activity, Gender
& Sexuality in the
World of *Cloud Nine*,
Theater Vocabulary,
The Complexities
of Genre, Historical
Context



“Plays should tell simple, honest stories.”

—David Mamet, American playwright & noted actor, William H. Macy, founders of Atlantic Theater Company



The following activities will assist your students in understanding the intentions of the playwright to tell a simple story.

Caryl Churchill presents her view of sexual and social conditions as artificial and farcical. As a result, she cross-casts many of the roles.

▲ACT 1

Edward



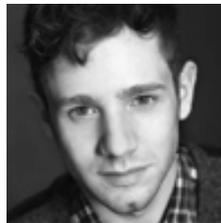
Joshua



Maud



Betty

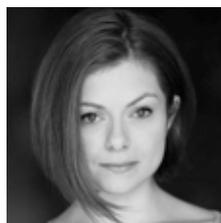


Harry Bagley



Ellen

Mrs. Saunders



Clive



▲ACT 2

Betty

Gerry

Victoria

Edward

Martin

Lin

Cathy

CRITICAL THINKING ACTIVITY

Teacher Objective

To develop critical thinking skills through examining the themes in *Cloud Nine*.

Student Goal

To understand that the story of the play relates to their own lives.

Materials

Chalk/Smart Board, paper, pens, the webbing ideas and discussion trigger.

Webbing Ideas

Stereotyping
Oppression
Hypocrisy
Intellectual games
Emotional games
Colonialism
Masks
Gender roles
Sexuality
Patriarchal society

Paradigm: A conceptual or methodological model underlying the theories and practices of a science or discipline at a particular time; (hence) a generally accepted world view.

DISCUSSION TRIGGER

In *Cloud Nine* Caryl Churchill challenges the social/political paradigms of the past and present. Does the concept of challenging the paradigm resonate with you as an audience member? What situations or choices in your own life relate to “challenging the paradigm”?

Step One

Write the Webbing Ideas on the chalk/Smart Board.

Step Two

Have each student add their impressions of the meaning of one of these concepts and how it relates to their own experience.

Step Three

Use the students' responses to focus on how unique each student's perception is of these concepts. Why is this true?

Step Four

Ask the students to discuss how “challenging the paradigm” is relevant to their own life experiences *i.e. with their families, communities.*

GENDER & SEXUALITY IN THE WORLD OF CLOUD NINE

Caryl Churchill scrutinizes themes of gender, sexuality, and sex to demonstrate the way capitalism, industry, and politics are impacted by them. These issues still resonate today. By doubling the casting of *Cloud Nine*, Caryl Churchill puts the viewer to the task of stripping away their preconceived notions of “male” and “female.” By being confronted with this abstract idea, and recognizing the differences between social constructs and biology, the audience is charged with developing their own understanding of identity.

Modern psychology tells us that gender and sex are different things entirely. Gender is distinguished by the social and cultural markers of our identity. Sex is defined by our biology at birth. Gender, sexuality, and sex play major roles in *Cloud Nine*. Many of the characters in the production are portrayed by actors who are not the same sex as the character they’re playing. Why might the playwright, Caryl Churchill, have created such an interesting dynamic? In considering this, it might be important to understand a bit about the societies from which these characters come.





GREAT BRITAIN AND ITS COLONIES IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY; 1870'S-1880'S

Great Britain in the 19th Century was a strictly patriarchal society. Patriarchal societies are designed to reflect the structure of a traditional male-led family. In this way, the government/government leaders fill the role of 'father' and citizens fill the role of 'child.' This puts the vast majority of power in the hands of the government, just as the power lies with the father in a traditional familial structure. Towards the end of the century, around when the first Act of *Cloud Nine* takes place, sanctions against homosexuality or any other sexual behaviors that were considered 'deviant' were in full effect, despite a small shift in ideas of gender equality. These sanctions, which were often legal in nature, labeled sexual acts that did not fit the narrow moral strictures (between husband and wife with the intention of child-bearing) as reprehensible and 'unnatural.' 'Male supremacy' was also the norm. Women were, in extreme cases, not permitted to even speak to men who wished to court them without a married woman present to chaperone. Men, on the other hand, often engaged in premarital relations. Because of this lopsided power structure, men were treated with more leniency. That said, homosexual acts were still punishable by law, including life imprisonment for some "offenses."



LONDON IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY; 1970'S-1980'S

The late 20th century brought major changes to society's perception of gender and sexuality. The women's movement gained significant momentum in the beginning of the 20th century, which brought about social and political changes. The Sexual Offences Act of 1967 effectively decriminalized homosexuality, birth control (the Pill) was invented, and attitudes towards sexuality dramatically shifted in popular culture. The 1960's are often considered the beginning of the sexual revolution in London. The media portrayed human sexuality in unprecedented ways. It was the time of The Beatles and mod fashion. The 1970's and 80's, the world in which the characters of *Cloud Nine* find themselves in Act II, existed in the aftermath of the "swinging sixties" and in the shadow of a more conservative social and political movement that followed. Despite visibility in pop culture, legal support, and major shifts in public perception, those on the front lines of the women's and gay right's movements still looked ahead to the many legal and societal hurdles that had not yet been cleared.

VOCABULARY RECAP

Gender: The state of being male or female as expressed by social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones.

Sex: Scientifically; either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and many other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions; (hence) the members of these categories viewed as a group; the males or females of a particular species.

Sexual Orientation: A person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to whom he or she is usually attracted; (broadly) the fact of being heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual.

From *Cloud Nine*; Act I:

Clive

“My son is young. I’m doing all I can to teach him how to grow up to be a man.”

Edward

“What father wants I’d dearly like to be. I find it hard as you can see.”

From *Cloud Nine*; Act I:

Betty

“I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life is to be what he looks for in a wife. I am a man’s creation as you see, and what men want is what I want to be.”

From *Cloud Nine*; Act I I:

Lin

“Ok. You’re gay, aren’t you?”

Edward

“I beg your pardon?”

Lin

“I really fancy your sister. I thought you’d understand. You do but you can go on pretending you don’t, I don’t mind...”

THEATER 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.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF GENRE

***Cloud Nine*, like many plays or movies you've probably seen, doesn't clearly fit into the confines of a specific genre. It has obvious comedic intentions, but has elements of drama, and even tragedy.**

Below is a list of genres you may not be as familiar with. You may notice many of the qualities of these subgenres in *Cloud Nine*.

Satire: A poem, a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary.

Farce: A proceeding (in this case, a play) that is ludicrously futile or insincere; a hollow pretense, a mockery.

Theater of the Absurd: A collective term for plays portraying the futility and anguish of man's struggle in a senseless and inexplicable world.

Epic Theatre/Brechtian Drama: Such as is described in epic poetry; epic theatre, a play or plays characterized by realism and an absence of theatrical devices.

Brecht proposed that theatre should not remove the spectator from reality. In his critical writing, he offers that the themes, ideas, and conflicts exposed in a drama are more important than an emotional connection to any one character. With this, he says that an audience will leave the theatre with a more critical/analytical understanding of the issues presented and thus be more compelled to take action.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

British Imperialism; Colonialism in Africa

By the time we find the characters of *Cloud Nine* in colonized Africa in the late part of the nineteenth century, the British had already maintained a presence there for over 200 years. The colonization of Africa was initially a product of the African slave trade in the 1600's. After the slave trade, there were still relatively few British colonies in Africa, as an important factor for the British were trade routes that required access to the coast. However, in the late 1860's, in response to the discovery of diamonds in the interior of the continent, train tracks were laid, mines constructed, and in a move to maintain a stronghold over these industrial and economic prospects, the British seized control over the land and people who resided in a vast expanse of the African continent. Because of their large expanse of territory (in Africa and across the world), the British sent administrators to oversee the land. These administrators, like Clive in *Cloud Nine*, were charged with maintaining strict control of the lands and the native people who inhabited them. They believed in a popular ideology of the time; "*the white man's burden.*" This was an idea believed by white colonizers that their task was to quell the natives through the imposition of Western culture, values, and beliefs.

Imperialism: The principle or policy of empire; the advocacy of holding political dominion or control over dependent territories; spec. (in 19th cent. British politics) the principle or policy of seeking or allowing the extension of the British Empire to protect trade and investments, and of uniting separate and distinct parts of the British Empire for the purposes of defense, commerce, communication, etc.

At the time, they felt it was their moral duty as they believed themselves to be a superior race.

By the late 1960's due to a plethora of financial, cultural, and political shifts (most significantly in the wake of World War II), all but one of Great Britain's African colonies were again recognized as independent nations. The last, Rhodesia, was granted independence in 1980, and became (present day) Zimbabwe.

Section 4:
Your Students
As Actors

Reading A Scene
for Understanding,
Practical Aesthetics,
Scene Analysis, Mini-
Lesson Vocabulary





“Actors should remain truthful to the story and their character.”

- David Mamet, American playwright & noted actor, William H. Macy, Founders of Atlantic Theater Company

The following activities are designed to assist your students in understanding the actor's *“job.”* Like every job, even acting has its *“tools.”*

The Practical Aesthetics acting technique was developed by David Mamet, William H. Macy and the founding members of the Atlantic Theater Company. This technique offers the actor a set of analytical tools to understand the playwright's intentions and what the characters want. This process of script analysis additionally helps define the actor's job on stage.

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 *Cloud Nine*, and copies of the Literal, Want, Action, As-If worksheet and/or Mini-Lesson.

PRACTICAL AESTHETICS

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 Acting Technique sheet. Have the students answer the four questions on the Scene Analysis Worksheet.

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.

A SCENE FROM CLOUD NINE

- Clive **We are not in this country to enjoy ourselves. Must have ridden fifty miles. Spoke to three different headmen who would all gladly chop off each other's heads and wear them round their waists.**
- Betty **Clive!**
- Clive **Don't be squeamish, Betty, let me have my joke. And what has my little dove done today?**
- Betty **I've read a little. Is it good? It's poetry. You're so delicate and sensitive. And I played the piano. Shall I send for the children?**
- Clive **Yes, in a minute. I've a piece of news for you.**
- Betty **Good news?**
- Clive **You'll certainly think it's good. A visitor.**
- Betty **From home?**
- Clive **No. Well of course originally from home.**
- Betty **Man or woman?**
- Clive **Man.**
- Betty **I can't imagine.**
- Clive **Something of an explorer. Bit of a poet. Odd chap but brave as a lion. And a great admirer of yours.**
- Betty **What do you mean? Whoever can it be?**
- Clive **With an H and a B. And does conjuring tricks for little Edward.**
- Betty **That sounds like Mr Bagley.**
- Clive **Harry Bagley.**

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 CLIVE...

IF YOU'RE PLAYING BETTY...

What is my character literally doing?

Clive is literally talking to Betty about Harry Bagley's arrival in their dangerous, unpredictable, colonial land.

Betty is literally talking to Clive about her day.

What does my character want?

Clive wants Betty to endlessly praise his heroism and bravery.

Betty wants Clive to tell she is the most dutiful wife a man could ever have.

What is the action I'm going to play?

To get someone to crown me king.

To get someone to give me a gold star.

The As-If...

It's as if my cousin Anthony proclaims in front of all my friends that no one in the world could beat him at Donkey Kong, especially me. So I have to prove to him that I am literally king of Donkey Kong; the greatest ever.

It's as if my boss is giving out one bonus this year to the employee who has the best work performance. I have to get him to praise my performance so I earn the bonus money; without it I can't buy my mom a Christmas gift!

KEY VOCABULARY

Literal: The process of accessing the basic story-line of the characters in a particular scene or beat.

Want: The process of identifying the goal of the character in a scene or beat.

Action: The actor's physical pursuit of a specific goal.

As-If: A way to determine what this action means to me.

HANDY TOOL KIT FOR THE ACTOR

Laughing to get what you want

Teasing to get what you want

Testing to get what you want

Threatening to get what you want

Pleading to get what you want

Flirting to get what you want

Bartering to get what you want

Bribing to get what you want

Begging to get what you want

Crying to get what you want

Demanding to get what you want

Leveling to get what you want

Inspiring to get what you want

Challenging to get what you want

**Section 5:
Your Students
As Artists**

Critical Thinking
Activity (Examining
Aesthetics), Theater
Genre Examination
Learning Log, Critical
Thinking: Attitudes
towards Gender
and Sexuality in Society,
Common Core & DOE
Theater Blueprint



“Create your own work.”

- David Mamet, American playwright
& noted actor, William H. Macy,
Founders of Atlantic Theater Company

*The following activities will assist your
students in understanding themselves as
artists creating original work that connects
with their own experiences and world.*



CRITICAL THINKING ACTIVITY

Teacher Objective

To develop critical thinking skills through examining the aesthetics of *Cloud Nine*.

Student Goal

To understand that their opinions and observations of an artistic experience are valuable in building an appreciation for their own lives and the world surrounding them.

Materials

Chalk/Smart Board, paper, pens and the worksheet (on the next page).

Step One

Divide the class into three groups.

Step Two

Assign each group one of the three discussion topics. Select one scribe for each group to record their brainstorming ideas, opinions and thoughts. Remind the students that there are no right or wrong answers to these triggers—just independent thoughts and points-of-view.

Step Three

Allow 5 to 7 minutes for the brainstorming activity.

Step Four

With the classroom teacher as moderator, ask each group's scribe to report back on their ideas.

Step Five

As the classroom teacher records the student responses on the chalk/smart board graphic, a discussion of the opinions and observations presented should happen.

Step Six

After the discussion ask the class to arrive at an agreed upon definition for each topic.

WHAT IS ART?

WHAT IS HISTORY?

**WHAT IS THE ROLE OF
AN ARTIST IN SOCIETY?**

THEATER GENRE EXAMINATION LEARNING LOG

Teacher Objective

To develop critical thinking skills through examining the aesthetics of *Cloud Nine*.

Student Goal

To understand that their opinions and observations of an artistic experience are valuable in building an appreciation for their own lives and the world surrounding them.

Materials

Chalk/Smart Board, paper, pens, the Genre Definition Sheet from Section 3, and the worksheet (on the next page).

Step One

Pre-Theater: Ask each student to review the genre sheet in Section 3 of the Study Guide.

Step Two

Pre-Theater: Ask each student to fill-in their ideas of “What I Think I Know” and “What I Want to Know” about the genres as they relate to *Cloud Nine* on the worksheet.

Step Three

Post-Theater: Ask each student to review their pre-theater thoughts and opinions.

Step Four

After reviewing their pre-theater notes, each student should write their ideas on the “What I Found Out” section of the worksheet.

Step Five

Lead a comparison/contrast discussion about why they feel their ideas and opinions may or may not have changed after viewing the production.

DISCUSSION / CREATIVE WRITING PROMPT

After seeing *Cloud Nine*, how would you categorize it? Do you think it has elements of satire, farce, Brechtian drama, theater of the absurd, or some other genres?

Do the staging of the play, the actor's portrayals of the characters, the text of the play, or the other production elements support your argument?

WHAT I KNOW

(Before you see *Cloud Nine*)

WHAT I WANT TO KNOW

(Before you see *Cloud Nine*)

WHAT I FOUND OUT

(After you see *Cloud Nine*)

CRITICAL THINKING ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER & SEXUALITY IN SOCIETY

Teacher Objective

To develop critical thinking skills through examining the social and political context of *Cloud Nine*.

Student Goal

To understand that their opinions and observations of an artistic experience are valuable in building an awareness of how theater can highlight, support, challenge—even reconstruct, social norms.

Materials

Chalk/Smart Board, paper, pens, worksheet (on the next page), “Gender & Sexuality in the World of *Cloud Nine* (from Section 3 of this study guide).

Step One

Have the class read the excerpt from section 3 of the study guide. As they discover information that pertains to each of the bullet points in the graphic (above) they should make notes.

Step Two

On the chalk/Smart board, draw a Venn diagram to record the information the students have noted on the graphic.

Step Three

Guide the students through selecting information that falls into both categories to complete the Venn diagram.

Step Four

Use the shared/overlapping information as the basis for discussing these social and moral concepts in the Twenty-First Century.

BRITISH ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN...

1880

1980

GENDER ROLES

THE SEXES

SEXUALITY

COMMON CORE & DOE THEATER BLUEPRINT

Enduring Understanding

Theater conveys the significance individuals place on the pursuit of their identity.

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

Essential Questions

Does the direction and staging reinforce the sense of social and sexual identity of each of the characters? Provide two examples.

Do you accept the premise put forward in *Cloud Nine* that a person's social, sexual, and gender identities shape society's perception of them and influence the way they are treated within their community?

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.

THE ATLANTIC LEGACY

Inspired by the Group Theater, Stanislavsky, and a passion for ensemble acting, David Mamet and William H. Macy formed the Atlantic Theater Company with a select group of New York University Undergraduate drama students. Since its inception in 1985, Atlantic has produced more than 100 plays and garnered numerous awards, including: 12 Tony Awards, 15 Lucille Lortel Awards, 16 OBIE Awards, six Outer Critics Circle Awards, seven Drama Desk Awards, three Drama League Awards, three New York Drama Critics Circle Awards and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Noted productions include: *Spring Awakening*, *Port Authority*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *Boy's Life*, and *American Buffalo*. The Atlantic Theater Company's mission is to produce plays simply and truthfully, utilizing an artistic ensemble. Atlantic believes that the story of the play and the intent of its playwright are at the core of a successful theatrical production.

The Atlantic Acting School fosters new generations of actors by passing on the tools learned from Mamet and Macy and by preparing students for all aspects of a career in film, television and theater. The Atlantic offers studies through New York University, a full time conservatory program, part-time programs and summer workshops. Atlantic for Kids offers acting classes in an after school setting as well as summer programs for children ages 4 to 18.

Linda Gross Theater
336 West 20th Street,
New York, NY, 10011

Atlantic Stage 2
330 West 16th Street,
New York, NY, 10011

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