

Study Guide: Students & Educators

MARIE AND ROSETTA

ATLANTIC THEATER COMPANY



World Premiere Play with Music



*By George Brant
Directed by Neil Pepe*

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**Section I:
The Play**

- Synopsis
- Characters
- Setting
- Themes



SYNOPSIS

A huge influence on Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Ray Charles and Jimi Hendrix, Sister Rosetta Tharpe was a legend in her time, bringing fierce guitar playing and swing to gospel music. Tharpe was the queen of 'race records' in the 30's and 40's, who performed mornings at churches and evenings at the Cotton Club, who was a big enough star to fill a baseball stadium for her third wedding, but ended up buried in an unmarked grave in Philadelphia. Marie and Rosetta chronicles her first rehearsal with a young protégée, Marie Knight, as they prepare to embark on a tour that would establish them as one of the great duet teams in musical history.

CHARACTERS

SISTER ROSETTA THARPE,
an African-American woman in her early 30's. Pretty, vivacious, an irrepressible spirit. A mean guitar player with a bluesy voice. Plays spirituals that swing.

MARIE KNIGHT,
an African-American woman in her early 20's, but looks younger. A more traditional alto gospel singer, plays staid piano. Gorgeous, on her way to being a spiritual star.

Teacher Objective

To introduce students to the characters, setting, and story of Maria and Rosetta.

Student Goal

To understand that actors, working together, will simply and truthfully create the story of the play.

SETTING

1946. A showroom in a modest funeral home.

THEMES

Transformation

Fate

Daring to be yourself

Sisterhood

Fictive Kinship

Section II:
Cast & Creative

Director And
Cast Bios





GEORGE BRANT
Playwright

GEORGE BRANT (Playwright). His plays include *Grounded*, *Elephant's Graveyard*, *The Mourners' Bench*, *Any Other Name*, *Salvage*, *Grizzly Mama*, and *Three Voyages of the Lobotomobile*. His scripts have been produced internationally by the Public Theater, Trinity Repertory Company, the Studio Theatre, Cleveland Play House, Alley Theatre, Gate Theatre, Page 73, and the Traverse Theatre, among others. Brant's plays have received a Lucille Lortel Award, the Smith Prize, a Scotsman Fringe First Award, an OAC Individual Excellence Award, an Off-West End Theatre Award, a Theatre Netto Festival Prize, an NNP Rolling World Premiere and the Keene Prize for Literature. He has received commissions from the Metropolitan Opera, Trinity Repertory Company, Cleveland Play House, Theatre 4 and Dobama Theatre. A proud member of the Dramatists Guild, Brant received his MFA in Writing from the Michener Center at UT-Austin and is published by Samuel French, Oberon Books and Smith & Kraus. He is currently adapting *Grounded* into a feature film starring Anne Hathaway.



NEIL PEPE
Director

NEIL PEPE (Director). Most recently directed the world premiere of Kenneth Lonergan's *Hold On To Me Darling*. Broadway credits include the musical *Hands on a Hardbody*, the acclaimed revival of David Mamet's *Speed-the-Plow* and *A Life in the Theatre*. Off-Broadway; John Guare's *3 Kinds of Exile*; Moira Buffini's *Dying For It*; Jez Butterworth's *Parlour Song*, *Mojo* and *The Night Heron*; Ethan Coen's *Happy Hour*, *Offices* and *Almost an Evening*; Harold Pinter's *Celebration* and *The Room*; Adam Rapp's *Dreams of Flying Dreams of Falling*; Joe Penhall's *Blue/Orange*; Hilary Bell's *Wolf Lullaby*; David Pittu's *What's That Smell?*; Howard Korder's *Sea of Tranquility*, (all at Atlantic); David Mamet's *American Buffalo* (Donmar Warehouse, Atlantic); *Romance*, *Keep Your Pantheon* and *School* (Center Theatre Group, Atlantic); Zinnie Harris' *Further than the Furthest Thing* (Manhattan Theatre Club); Jessica Goldberg's *Refuge* (Playwrights Horizons); Tom Donaghy's *The Beginning of August* (South Coast Repertory, Atlantic). Frank Gilroy's *The Subject Was Roses with Martin Sheen* (CTG). Also, Eric Bogosian's *Red Angel* (Williamstown Theatre Festival). Neil has been the Artistic Director of the award-winning Off-Broadway company, Atlantic Theater Company since 1992.



REBECCA NAOMI JONES
(Marie Knight)

REBECCA NAOMI JONES (Marie Knight) has performed on Broadway in *American Idiot*, *Passing Strange*, and most recently as Yitzhak in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. Other New York work includes *Murder Ballad* at MTC (Lilly Award and Lucille Lortel nomination), Signature Theater's production of *Big Love* (Drama League nomination), *The Fortress of Solitude* (Public Theater), *Love's Labour's Lost* (Shakespeare in the Park) and the recent ENCORES production of *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater*. Rebecca also recently performed at the Williamstown Theater Festival in *Cost of Living*. Films: *The Big Sick* (upcoming, produced by Judd Apatow), *Ratter* (2014 Slamdance Film Festival Selection), *Geezer* (2015 TriBeCa Film Festival Selection), *Passing Strange* (Spike Lee), and the documentary *Broadway Idiot*. Select Television: "Sex&Drugs&Rock&Roll", "Inside Amy Schumer", "Limitless", "Difficult People", "High Maintenance" and "Blue Bloods". Solo concerts: Lincoln Center American Songbook, Apollo Cafe. Rebecca is an Associate Artist with the Civilians Theater Company and holds a BFA in Drama from the North Carolina School of the Arts.



KECIA LEWIS
(Sister Rosetta Tharpe)

KECIA LEWIS (Sister Rosetta Tharpe). From originating the role of "Asaka, Mother of The Earth" on Broadway in *Once on This Island*, to her Classic Stage debut in the title role of *Mother Courage*, Kecia Lewis's rich career of portraying powerful mothers and formidable women has come full circle. It all began when she was 18 years old and made her debut as "Effie" in the original Broadway company of *Dreamgirls*. Kecia went on to be seen on Broadway in *Big River*, *Ain't Misbehavin*, *The Gospel at Colonus*, and earned a Drama Desk Nomination for her work in *Dessa Rose* at Lincoln Center Theater. Kecia originated the roles of "Trix" and "Ida Mae" in the Broadway productions of *The Drowsy Chaperone* and *Leap of Faith*, respectively, and took over the reins of "Mama Morton" in *Chicago*. She was most recently seen flying through the air, spreading joy and magic as "The Fairy Godmother" on the first national tour of *Cinderella*. On television, she can be seen guest starring on "Law & Order SVU" (recurring), "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt" (Season 2), "Limitless," and "Blue Bloods."

RICCARDO HERNÁNDEZ **(Scenic Designer)**

Broadway: *The Gin Game*; *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*; *The People in the Picture*; *Caroline, or Change* (also Royal National Theater London); Elaine Stritch at Liberty (also National Tour, Old Vic London); *Topdog/Underdog* (Royal Court); *Bells Are Ringing*; *Parade* (directed by Hal Prince, Tony and Drama Desk nominations); *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk* (also National Tour, Japan); *The Tempest*. Recent: Paula Vogel's *Indecent* (Vineyard Red Speedo (NYTW), *The Father and A Doll's House* (TFANA), *Don Giovanni* (Santa Fe Opera), *Grounded* (directed by Julie Taymor), *The Library* (directed by Steven Soderbergh) both for Public Theater, La Mouette (Cour D'Honneur, Palais des Papes – Avignon Festival), *Abigail's Party* (Oslo National Theater, Norway), *Othello* and *The Dead* (Abbey Theater Dublin), *Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* (Ljubljana/Slovenia). He has designed over 200 productions in the US and internationally at Public Theater, BAM, American Repertory Theater, Lincoln Center Theater, NYTW, Goodman, Guthrie, Lyric Opera of Chicago, HGO, San Francisco Opera, NYCO, LA Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Theatre du Chatelet Paris, Theater an der Wien (Vienna), Teatro Real Madrid, English National Opera/Young Vic, etc., Genet's *Splendid's* (La Colline-Theatre National Paris) Yale School of Drama.

DEDE M. AYITE **(Costume Designer)**

Off-Broadway: *The Royale* (Lincoln Center Theater), *Ugly Lies the Bone* (Roundabout); *brownsville song* (b-side for tray) (LCT3); *ToasT*, *Urban Retreat*, and *Manahatta* (The Public). Select Regional: *The Last Tiger in Haiti* (La Jolla Playhouse and upcoming Berkeley Repertory Theatre); *Jelly's Last Jam* (Signature Theatre); *The Wiz* (OSF); *Detroit '67* (Centerstage/Detroit Public Theater); *Between Riverside and Crazy* (Studio Theatre); *The Blood Quilt* (Arena Stage); *Marie Antoinette* (Steppenwolf, 2015 Jeff Award Recipient); *Stagger Lee* (Dallas Theatre Center); *The CA Lyons Project* (Alliance Theatre); *Five Guys Named Moe* (Arena Stage/Cleveland Playhouse); *A Raisin in the Sun* (California Shakespeare Theater); *The Piano Lesson* (Yale Repertory Theatre); *The Music Man in Concert* (Two Rivers, NJPAC). Education: MFA from Yale School of Drama

CHRISTOPHER AKERLIND **(Lighting Designer)**

Atlantic: *Two Unrelated Plays* by David Mamet, *This Thing of Darkness*, *The Lights* (at Lincoln Center). Broadway: *Rocky, End of the Rainbow*, *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* (Tony nom.), *Superior Donuts*, *Top Girls*, *110 in the Shade* (Tony nom.), *Talk Radio*, *Shining City*, *Awake and Sing* (Tony nom.), *Well*, *Rabbit Hole*, *A Touch of the Poet*, *In My Life*, *The Light in the Piazza* (Drama Desk, Outer Critics, Tony awards), *Reckless*, *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*, *Seven Guitars* (Tony nom.) and *The Piano Lesson*. With Martha Clark: *Chéri* (Signature), *Angel Reapers* (The Joyce), *Garden of Earthly Delights* (Minetta Lane), *L'altra metà del cielo* (Teatro alla Scala), *Kaos* (NY Theater Workshop), *Belle Epoque* (Mitzi Newhouse). Awards: Obie for Sustained Excellence, Michael Merritt Award for Design and Collaboration, among others.

SCK SOUND DESIGN **(Sound Design)**

Steve Canyon Kennedy partners with sound designers Walter Trarbach and Andrew Keister. Some of their Broadway shows together include: *On Your Feet*, *Doctor Zhivago*, *Lady Day* at Emerson's Bar and Grill, (Tony Award), *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *700 Sundays*, *Hands On A Hardbody* (Drama Desk Award), *Catch Me If You Can*, (Tony Nom), *The Lion King*, *Jersey Boys* (Drama Desk Award), *Hairspray*, *Mary Poppins*, *The Producers*, *Aida*, *Titanic*, *Carousel* and *The Who's Tommy* (Drama Desk Award).

JASON MICHAEL WEBB **(Musical Director/ Arranger/Orchestrator)**

Atlantic Theater – debut. Broadway – Musical Director: *The Color Purple* (2016 Tony Award, Best Musical Revival); Associate Musical Director: *Motown: The Musical*, *Violet*, *Leap of Faith*, *Memphis*. Off-Broadway – Musical Director: *Dogfight* (2second Stage), *Choir Boy* (MTC). Regional – Musical Director: *Cardboard Piano* (Actors Theatre of Louisville); *Marley* (CenterStage). Music Supervisor – Disney's *Frozen: Live at the Hyperion* (Anaheim, CA) (also Arranger/Adaptor); *Indian Joe* (Goodspeed Musicals) (also Composer/Orchestrations). Composer – Book/Music/Lyrics/Orchestrations: *The First Noel* (Apollo Theater/CTH). Awards – Dove Award winner (Brooklyn Tabernacle's Declare Your Name), 2x Stellar Award nominee, Suzi Award nominee (Choir Boy, Alliance Theater), Rhinebeck Writer's Retreat. Arranger – Battle Hymn of the Republic (2013 Inauguration of President Barack Obama), *Violet* (Broadway, Additional Arrangements), *Cardboard*

Piano (Actors Theatre of Louisville, Arrangements), *Marley* (CenterStage, Additional Arrangements/Orchestrator), *Choir Boy* (MTC). Orchestrator – Jacksonville Symphony, Nashville String Machine, Carnegie Hall. Pianist – Dame Shirley Bassey, Jennifer Hudson, Michael Bolton, Fantasia, Chaka Khan – Ephesians 3:17-19 | JasonMichaelWebb.com

MICHAEL DOMUE **(Production Stage Manager)**

is excited to once again work with George Brant after *The Mourners Bench* at Trinity Repertory Company. Also at Trinity: *Camelot*, *Cabaret*. Other Regional credits: *In Your Arms* (Old Globe); *Dracula*, *Topdog/Underdog*, Sherlock Holmes: *The Final Adventure*, *Becky Shaw*, *The As If Body Loop*, *Natural Selection*, *The Shaker Chair*, *Pure Confidence*, *The Ruby Sunrise*, *The Lively Lad* (Actors Theatre of Louisville/Humana Festival) and *Race* (Philadelphia Theater Company). Off-Broadway: *Urge for Going*, *Knives and Other Sharp Objects*, *The Last Cargo Cult*, *The Ruby Sunrise* (The Public Theater). Recent summers at New York Stage and Film: *Roar of the Greasepaint*, *Smell of the Crowd*, *Noir*, *Unbuilt City*, and *In Your Arms* after 17 summers at Totem Pole Playhouse. Additional Credits: *Master Class*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Company* and *Alexander and the Terrible...* (The Kennedy Center) and New York Spring Spectacular, Heart and Lights and The Radio City Christmas Spectacular (Radio City Music Hall).

LIZZY LEE **(Assistant Stage Manager)**

is thrilled to be working with the Atlantic Theater Company! She recently was at the Oriental Theater in Chicago with *The SpongeBob Musical*. Broadway: *Motown*. Tours: *Dirty Dancing*, *Flashdance*. New York: *The Wildness* (Ars Nova); *Futurity* (Ars Nova/Soho Rep); *LoveSick*, *The Revival* (Project Y); *Our Lot* (Clubbed Thumb); *Twelfth Night* (Fiasco). Regional: *Gnit*, *Michael von Siebenberg Melts Through the Floorboards*, *Edith Can Shoot Things and Hit Them*, *It Takes a 'Ville*, *Heist!* (Actors Theatre of Louisville/Humana Festival). Recent summers at New York Stage and Film: *Fury*, *The Wild Hunt*, *Loving V. Virginia*, *15 Minutes*, and *In Your Arms*. International: *Hamlet/UR Hamlet*, *A Dream Play* (Theater Mita/Abu Dhabi, UAE). Lizzy is a proud lady of Kenyon College.

FELICIA COLLINS **(Guitar)**

is best known around the world as the guitarist and vocalist in the CBS Orchestra on the LATE SHOW WITH DAVID LETTERMAN. It was at the end of Cyndi Lauper's Hat Full Of Stars tour summer of 1993, when Paul Shaffer contacted Collins about joining his band for the highly-publicized forthcoming Late Show With David Letterman on CBS. She was recruited along with P-Funk keyboardist Bernie Worrell and remained a constant nightly presence on network television for the show's entire 23-year run. As a musician, Felicia Collins' long-standing reputation is as one of the most versatile. As a member of the CBS Orchestra a.k.a. World's Most Dangerous Band, each day brought a different artist to play with on live television... Pavorotti one day, L.L. Cool J. the next! Ev-er-y-body. A devoted passion for playing guitar was always present, as far back in her memory as she's able to recall. Teaching herself to play was an early manifestation of her childhood love affair with the Arts. Having a deep admiration and perhaps affinity to her, Felicia is delighted to pay tribute to this great musical innovator – Sister Rosetta Tharpe

DEAH HARRIOTT **(Piano)**

Off-Broadway debut. A classically trained musician and pianist from the age of three. Recipient of the prestigious Mayor's Art Award, Cultural Celebration (Nebraska). She is most recently an honoree and recipient of the Concerned Women of Brooklyn Inc.'s Outstanding Leadership Award where she was recognized for her contributions to the community of Brooklyn, NY. Ms. Harriott toured throughout the Midwest with her gospel group Deah Harriott & Images. Currently she is the minister of music at Bethany Baptist Church of Brooklyn and is the Music Director at two other NY-area churches, specializing in piano and organ (Hammond and pipe), with focuses in classical, gospel, jazz, and R&B. Favorite accomplishments include conducting the Tony Award winning musical *The Wiz*, and the studio project "Sacrifice," by gospel music group Deah Harriott & Images which she wrote and produced, and is currently available online. She is also a featured artist on the inspirational project Gerald Jones Presents: Independent Spirit (released fall of 2015) which includes Deah's inspirational single "Answer With Praise". Her joys in life are PEOPLE, COOKING, LAUGHTER and LOVE, and she is the proud mother of two (canines), Jackson Thomas and Mr. Bentley James.

Section III: Your Students As Audience

Theater Vocabulary

Relating Themes to
Our Own Lives:

The First Badass Female

Guitarist: Meet

Sister Rosetta Tharpe,

the Godmother of

Rock 'n' Roll

Fictive Kinship in

Marie & Rosetta

Webbing & Discussion

Triggers



“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.

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.

WEBBING & DISCUSSION TRIGGERS

Teacher Objective

To develop critical thinking skills through examining the themes in *Marie and Rosetta*.

Student Goal

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

Materials

Chalkboard, chalk, paper, pens, the webbing ideas, and discussion triggers.

Webbing Ideas

Transformation

Fate

Daring to be yourself

Sisterhood

Fictive Kinship

Discussion Questions

ROSETTA I was mad but Mother Bell was right.
Even then.
Even at eight years old I was worth more than
a white man's pocket change.
You got to know.
You got to know what your gift's worth.

Question: Can you relate to Rosetta's situation? Has there ever been a time that you felt like you were worth more than you were being treated in your life? Or did you feel like you were selling yourself short? How would/did you handle that situation?

Step One

Write the Webbing Ideas on the chalkboard.

Step Two

Have each student add their impressions of the meaning of one of these concepts on the board, and how it relates to their own experiences.

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 their sense of personal self-esteem and/or vulnerability plays a role in their own lives.

Step Five

Share the discussion trigger and questions with the class.

What are the obstacles we create for ourselves and others in our society, and what do we do when circumstances reveal the vulnerability behind those obstacles?

What is reality, and can artists ever truly capture it?

RELATING THEMES TO OUR OWN LIVES

**The First Badass Female Guitarist:
Meet Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the
Godmother of Rock 'n' Roll**

by Stereo Williams

The Daily Beast

May 28, 2016

Fictive Kinship in *Marie & Rosetta*



REBECCA NAOMI JONES and KECIA LEWIS in Atlantic Theater Company's *MARIE AND ROSETTA* Photos by Ahron R. Foster

THE FIRST BADASS FEMALE GUITARIST: MEET SISTER ROSETTA THARPE, THE GODMOTHER OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

by Stereo Williams | *The Daily Beast* | May 28, 2016

She influenced Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and countless others, but Sister Rosetta Tharpe was a legend in her own right.



Meet Sister Rosetta Tharpe, The Godmother of Rock 'N' Roll

IN RECENT MONTHS, a video has gone viral depicting a robust, middle-aged woman in grainy black and white ripping one of the meanest guitar solos you've ever seen.

The woman featured is none other than Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the "Godmother of Rock 'n' Roll," who has one of the more enviable legacies in music. Her musical disciples and descendants reads like a who's-who of legendary '50s and '60s figures, her personal history bears the earmarks of a classic outlaw, and her music is richly powerful and evocative—soul-stirring in the truest sense of the term. What a legacy that is—but that legacy has long been obscured.

For decades, fans and critics tended to gloss over pre-1955 music as compared to the music of the late 20th century, and the fact that she was a gospel star likely places her in a certain niche in the minds of the general public. While names like Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, Elvis Presley, Little Richard, and Jerry Lee Lewis became etched into the culture's collective consciousness, Sister Rosetta Tharpe was rarely mentioned in the same breath—or even as an obvious forbear—to her rock 'n' roll offspring who would carry the genre into the mainstream.

Born Rosetta Nubin in Cotton Plant, Arkansas, her mother, Katie Bell Nubin, was a singer, preacher, and mandolin player for the Church of God In Christ (COGIC) who encouraged little Rosetta to play and sing for services. A clear prodigy, it was through her association with COGIC that Rosetta would evolve into one of the most amazing gospel performers of her time. It was a church that believed in musical expression and was progressive in its view of gender roles within the church, encouraging women ministers and musicians. After moving to Chicago, little Rosetta and her mother became fixtures within the city's gospel music scene.

At 19 years old, she would marry a minister named Thomas A. Thorpe in 1934, but the union would be short-lived. Though they divorced, Rosetta would keep his last name as her stage name—slightly altering "Thorpe" to "Tharpe."



PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY ("SISTER ROSETTA THARPE, 1943)



Sister Rosetta Tharpe performing live PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY

Upon signing with Decca Records, Tharpe issued singles that are instant smashes. Her versions of Thomas Dorsey tunes like “This Train” made her a household name—in particular, her reworked version of “Hide Me In Thy Bosom” (retitled “This Train”) was a breakthrough for her as a recording artist. Backed by Lucky Millinder’s jazz orchestra, the song raised her visibility with secular and white audiences and set the stage for a remarkable run that saw her perform at Carnegie Hall (as part of John Hammond’s “Spirituals to Swing” showcase) and record music with Cab Calloway and the Jordanaires. She also made recordings for U.S. troops stationed overseas; Tharpe was one of only two black gospel artists included on these “V Discs”—along with the Dixie Hummingbirds. But it was her song “Strange Things Happening Every Day” that proved a major leap forward for both her career and gospel music; it was the first gospel hit on the Billboard R&B charts, peaking at #2.

She would team up with gospel singer Marie Knight, whom she’d seen perform in Harlem with Mahalia Jackson, and the two would tour together throughout the 1940s as “The Saint (Knight) and the Sinner (Tharpe).” By 1951, she’d become

so popular that 25,000 people paid to watch her wedding to her third husband, Russell Morrison, in Griffith Stadium in Washington, D.C. That same year, Tharpe and Knight would make an ill-fated attempt to forge a career in straight-ahead blues.

Tharpe’s forays into the mainstream and secular worlds had been a delicate balancing act up to that point; they’d earned her some scorn but also notoriety. But the early ‘50s blues records hurt her gospel standing and the partnership she’d enjoyed with Knight. In 1951, Knight left to pursue a solo career in secular music while Tharpe tried to return to gospel. But her attempted move into blues totally alienated fans and by the late 1950s, she’d been dropped by Decca as her popularity waned. She continued to perform as a major draw in overseas markets throughout the 1960s, sparked by the decade’s resurgent interest in blues music. She would tour Europe with bluesmen like Muddy Waters and Otis Spann and remained a consistent performer until a stroke slowed her down in 1970. Tharpe subsequently died in Philadelphia in 1973. She was 58.

She lived her life boldly, daring to play guitar aggressively at a time when female guitarists of any discipline were rare. She chose to embrace secular artists and audiences at a time when the black gospel community was loud in its condemnation of crossing over. And her own sexual identity has been the subject of much candor. Her attempts at marriage have been called a facade by some who've claimed that Tharpe was bisexual, and only considered marriage for appearances and to pander to gospel's conservative audience. Her biographer, Gayle Wald, wrote that one fellow musician claimed to have walked in on Tharpe and two other women in bed during her "honeymoon tour" right after her third wedding in 1951.

"The circulation of this and other lore indicated that the gospel world had its own legends of outlaw identities and behaviors: of sissy men and bulldagger women, of philandering evangelists and pilfering prophets, of hypocrites who boozed up backstage before singing in front of the curtain about the virtues of holy living," wrote Wald. "For homosexuals in her audiences, rumors about Rosetta's sexuality might have been liberating, an invitation to look for tell-tale signs of affirmation of their own veiled existence."

Her status as an important figure in music has largely been muted due to both rock's whitewashing and the tendency to elevate the male rock star mythos while treating the genre's most significant women like footnotes. To be certain, Sis. Rosetta Tharpe paved the way for countless musical women in general and in rock 'n' roll specifically—but make no mistake, she also paved the way for men who wanted to play this style of music, black and white men who decided to incorporate her sure-fingered guitar style and swingin' grooves into the template of what would become a world-changing genre.

Later performers like Little Richard, Tina Turner, and Johnny Cash cited Tharpe as a major influence; and her intricate electric guitar style set the template for what would be considered "lead guitar" in Chicago blues and early rock 'n' roll. In the past few years, there have been documentaries and articles that celebrate Tharpe as an important figure in 20th century music who helped set the stage for many of the sounds that would come to define rock 'n' roll and R&B. But it's just as important to remember how great she was on her own merit as an artist and musical force—not just who she influenced.



US postage stamp - Sister Rosetta Tharpe. STAMPCOLLECTION/ALAMY

The term "pioneer" can sometimes be a pejorative. Contemporary music fans toss it off in a way that suggests a certain artists' significance only exists as a trailblazer, that they only matter because they "paved the way" for the music you actually care about that came afterwards. That shouldn't happen with Sis. Rosetta Tharpe. One listen to songs like "Rock Me," "That's All," and "Jericho" and it's obvious that the spirit and fire of gospel music, along with the swing and sincerity of the blues, came crashing into each other and bursting out in this woman's amazing songs.

She was obviously a pioneer. She was also obviously a genius.

FICTIVE KINSHIP IN *MARIE AND ROSETTA*

THROUGHOUT *MARIE & ROSETTA*, Sister Rosetta Tharpe is insistent that Marie Knight call her “sister.” Of course her stage name was Sister Rosetta Tharpe, derived from a variation of her ex-husband’s last name (Thorpe), and the honorific name given to women anointed into the church where Rosetta discovered her voice, the Church of God in Christ. But Sister Rosetta Tharpe insists on calling Marie sister as well. This is an example of fictive kinship. Groups of people from many communities with shared social, economic, or cultural experiences, however micro or macro, sometimes refer to other members of that community as brothers, sisters, or simply, “family.” These identifiers are made without regard to any biological or legal connection. This is known in sociology, ethnography, and anthropology, as “fictive kinship.”

“The term fictive kinship refers to connections between members of a group who are unrelated by blood or marriage, but who nonetheless share reciprocal social or economic relationships... I draw on the deep tradition of black fictive kinship when I refer to black women as sisters. This imagined community of familial ties underscores a voluntary sense of shared identity... Fictive kinship makes the accomplishments of African Americans relevant to unrelated black individuals.”

-Melissa Harris-Perry BOOK

AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER, note the development of the relationship between Marie and Rosetta throughout the play. Use the given circumstances of the play; the socioeconomic climate at the end of World War II, a pre-Civil Rights era United States, the male dominated music industry, etc., to hypothesize why the relationship between the two women might be a strong example of a fictive kinship. Also consider Sister Rosetta Tharpe’s stage name.

“Ethnographic research documents that fictive kin are important members of the informal networks of African American families. Fictive kin are defined as individuals who are unrelated by either blood or marriage, but regard one another in kinship terms. Fictive kin are accorded many of the same rights and statuses as family members and are expected to participate in the duties of the extended family.”

- Racial and Ethnic Differences in Extended Family, Friendship, Fictive Kin and Congregational Informal Support Networks



REBECCA NAOMI JONES and KECIA LEWIS in Atlantic Theater Company's MARIE AND ROSETTA Photos by Ahron R. Foster 18

Section IV: Your Students As Actors

Reading a Scene for
Understanding

Practical Aesthetics
Exercise

Mini-Lesson Vocabulary

Scene Analysis
Worksheet



“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 *Marie and Rosetta*, 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 Aesthetics Acting Technique sheet on page 23 and 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 MARIE AND ROSETTA

MARIE I guess I don't
Don't get too much practice
Mama's not too fond of fun
Says no joke in the Bible
Not one
Says if the Lord meant for us to have fun
He'd put at least one in there

ROSETTA That true?
There's gotta be a joke or two

MARIE Nope

ROSETTA All right if you say so
But there's joy right?

MARIE There's joy

ROSETTA Damn right -
(to Marie) Pardon
(to Heaven) Pardon
- there's joy
It's all Joy is what it is
The whole Book
Right
Whether it's suffering or celebration
It's all about Joy

MARIE Yes but

ROSETTA Well maybe you found different in your
many years on this earth
but me I found where there's Joy
there's a joke

MARIE Guess so

ROSETTA That's what Mahalia
and all them don't understand
Saint Mahalia
God ain't up there
frownin' down on all'a us
Shakin' his head
His Holy finger
Pursin' his lips every time
we cross some imaginary line
No
God up there chucklin' away at all'a us
All us saints and sinners
Can't wait to see what his silly children
gonna come up with next

MARIE Right

ROSETTA No disrespect to your Mama
No disrespect but we got to have us some fun
We got to have us some fun
or your Mama can have you right back again

MARIE Yes ma'am

ROSETTA Sister Sister
Tell you what
We'll give this tonight
You and me
See how it goes
Tonight and we'll see where we at

MARIE All right

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.

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

SCENE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Here are your “tools” for understanding your character:

IF YOU'RE PLAYING MARIE...

IF YOU'RE PLAYING ROSETTA...

What is my character literally doing?

Marie and Rosetta are literally talking about jokes and joy in the bible

Marie and Rosetta are literally talking about jokes and joy in the bible.

What does my character want?

Marie wants Rosetta to understand that she has been raised to be respectful of the bible and not make jokes.

Rosetta wants Marie to lighten up and relax.

What is the action I'm going to play?

To get someone to take the high road.

To get someone to join my party.

The As-If...

It's As-If my friend did not get cast in the school play, but I want him to sign up to help paint the set with me.

It's As-If I'm trying to get my friend who is afraid of heights to ride the new big roller coaster.

**Section V:
Your Students
As Artists**

Post Theater Creative
Response Activity

Post Theater Creative
Writing Activity

Common Core &
DOE Theater Blueprint



“Create your own work.”

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



KECIA LEWIS in Atlantic Theater Company's MARIE AND ROSETTA Photos by Ahron R. Foster

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

POST-THEATER CREATIVE RESPONSE ACTIVITY

Teacher Objective

To develop Critical Thinking skills through examining a moment in *Marie and Rosetta* and how to relate that moment to an individual creative response.

Student Goal

To understand that a critical moment from *Marie and Rosetta* forms the truths and messages of the play.

Step One

Divide the students into pairs, asking them to read the scene from *Marie and Rosetta* on the next page.

Step Two

Ask students to break down the scene using the Atlantic Acting Technique.

Literal

Want

Action

As-If

Step Three

Ask the students to share their choices/analysis on the scene, and discuss the variations of those choices.

Step Four

Get the scene on its “feet” with your own analysis.

A SCENE FROM MARIE AND ROSETTA

ROSETTA They got joy?

MARIE They do
But I'm not sure it's the right kind

ROSETTA There more than one kind?

MARIE I think so
Your joy...has hips

ROSETTA Sure do
And who made those hips
Who made them swing

MARIE I know I'm just scared

ROSETTA Of me?

MARIE You're trying to get back in but I'm just starting out
This don't work
The two of us?
People still paint you with that sinful brush?
They're gonna paint me too
And I'll be over before I start
And more than that
I may have a husband
But I am pure
I am washed in the blood of the Lamb
I am sanctified
And I need to be brought back the way I was found

ROSETTA I see
Well
I'm right with God too Little Sister
Don't you worry 'bout me that none
I been forgivin for anything I've done
Jesus forgives me seven times seventy a day
You'll just have to believe
Faith
Think you can do that?
Can you do that for tonight my little lamb?

(Marie nods, blushing.)

There you go again
Blushing without blush
I don't think you as grown up as you think
Now
Your piano
That's a different story
Your piano's a little too grown up

MARIE What?

POST-THEATER CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITY

Teacher Objective

To develop critical thinking skills and emotional literacy through examining the characters in *Marie and Rosetta* and how they relate to a student's own experiences.

Student Goal

To understand connecting the vivid details of an artistic experience to one's own point of view stimulates individual imagination and confidence.

Materials

Pencils, pens, writing paper, chalkboard.

Step One

Review the storyline of the play focusing on the themes of fate and the influence of a chance individual connection on an individual's life journey.

Step Two

Instruct students to respond to the following writing trigger. Really allow students to think freely through for a 7-minute free write:

Reflect on a time in your life when a person caused you to change for the better or worse.

Step Three

Encourage students to share their reflections aloud. Follow each share with positive feedback on what is working well in their creative writing piece.

COMMON CORE & DOE THEATER BLUEPRINT

Enduring Understanding

Theater conveys the significance individuals place on their life choices. For example: Jobs, relationships, hopes for the future.

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

Do the direction and staging reinforce the themes of kinship, the ability to rise above your circumstances, and transformation?

Do you accept the concept put forward in *Marie and Rosetta* that we are a product of our circumstances, but that we can sometimes transform ourselves, even in the face of adversity?

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 6: The Atlantic Legacy

Atlantic Theater Company &
Atlantic Acting School

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

ATLANTIC ACTING SCHOOL