

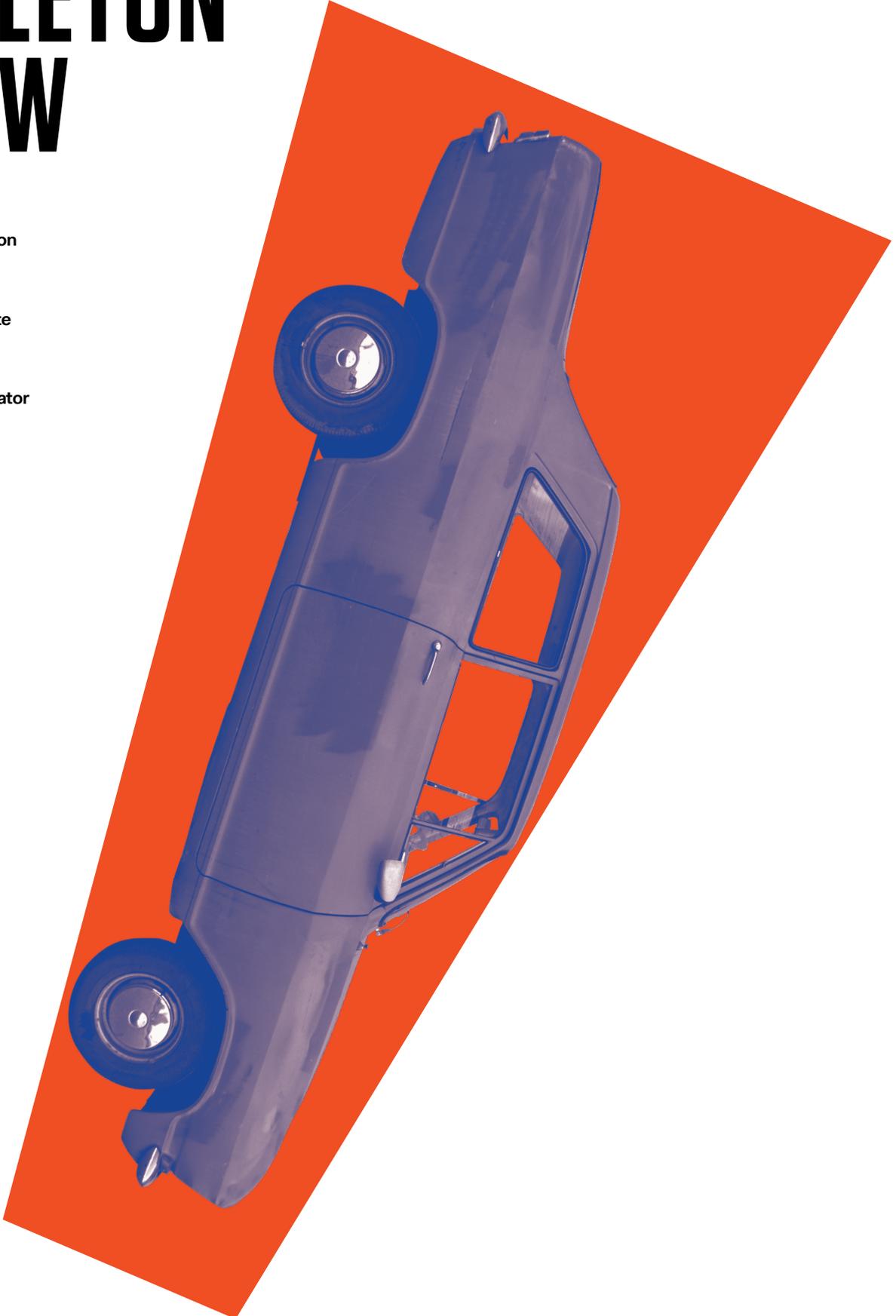
Study Guide: Students & Educators

# SKELETON CREW

Heather Baird  
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ATLANTIC THEATER COMPANY

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# SYNOPSIS

In Dominique Morisseau's third play in her Detroit trilogy, a make-shift family of workers at the last exporting auto plant in the city navigate the possibility of foreclosure. Power dynamics shift, and they are pushed to the limits of survival. When the line between blue collar and white collar gets blurred, how far over the lines are they willing to step?

# CHARACTERS

## FAYE

Black woman, mid-late 50's, Working class woman. Tough and a lifetime of dirt beneath her nails. Somewhere, deep compassion.

## DEZ

Black man, mid-late 20's, Working class man. Young hustler, playful, street-savvy, and flirtatious. Somewhere, deeply sensitive.

## SHANITA

Black woman, mid-late 20's, Working class young woman. Pretty but not ruled by it. Hard-working. By-the-books. Believes in the work she does. Also, pregnant. Somewhere, a beautiful dreamer.

## REGGIE

Black man, late 30's. White collar man. Studios. Dedicated. Compassionate. The Foreman. Somewhere, a fire brims.

# SETTING

Detroit, Michigan. Stamping Plant. Winter. Somewhere around year 2008.

# THEMES

Power

Masculinity/Femininity

Race

Social Justice

"A Cog in a Machine"

Worker's Rights

Sacrifice

Loyalty

Desperation

The Greater Good

Pride/Ownership

**Section II:**  
**Cast & Creative**  
Director And  
Cast Bios





**DOMINIQUE MORISSEAU**  
*Playwright*

DOMINIQUE MORISSEAU (Playwright) is an alumna of the Public Theater Emerging Writer's Group, Women's Project Lab, and Lark Playwrights Workshop. Credits include: *Skeleton Crew* (Sundance; Lark Barebones); *Paradise Blue* (Williamstown Theatre Festival); *Detroit '67* (Public Theater, Classical Theatre of Harlem/NBT); *Blood at the Root* (Penn State); *Sunset Baby* (Gate Theatre; LAByrnth Theatre); *Follow Me to Nellie's* (O'Neill; Premiere Stages). Her 3-play cycle, entitled "The Detroit Projects" include *Detroit '67*, *Paradise Blue* and *Skeleton Crew*. Her play *Blood at the Root* has toured internationally and garnered her production The Graham F. Smith Peace Foundation Award. Dominique has been commissioned by Steppenwolf, LCT3, Women's Project, South Coast Rep, People's Light & Theatre and Oregon Shakespeare Festival/ Penumbra Theater. Awards: Jane Chambers Playwriting Award, two-time NAACP Image Award, Stavis Playwriting Award, Spirit of Detroit Award, Weissberger Award, PoNY Fellowship, Sky-Cooper New American Play Prize, TEER Spirit Trailblazer Award, the Steinberg Playwright Award and the Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama.

**RUBEN SANTIAGO-HUDSON**  
*Director*

RUBEN SANTIAGO-HUDSON (Director) most recently staged the Encores! revival of *Cabin in the Sky* at NY City Center. Other recent productions include the world premieres of Dominique Morisseau's *Paradise Blue* at The Williamstown Theatre Festival and *Your Blues Ain't Sweet Like Mine* at The Two River Theater Co. Other directing credits include *The Piano Lesson* (OBIE, Lucille Lortel, Joseph A. Callaway, Audelco), *The Happiest Song Plays Last* (Second Stage Theatre), *My Children! My Africa!*, *Seven Guitars* and *The First Breeze of Summer* all at The Signature Theatre Company and *Things of Dry Hours* at NY Theatre Workshop. His screenplay adaptation of his autobiographical play *Lackawanna Blues* garnered numerous awards including The Humanitas Prize, National Board of Reviews, NAACP Image Award and The Christopher Award as well as Emmy, Golden Globe and WGA nominations. As an actor, Mr. Santiago-Hudson is the recipient of a Tony Award®, OBIE Award, Clarence Derwent and Helen Hayes Awards among others. Ruben holds a BA from Binghamton University, an MFA from Wayne State University and Doctor of Humane Letters Honors from Wayne State University and Buffalo State College.

**JASON DIRDEN**  
*(Dez)*

JASON DIRDEN (Dez). Broadway: *A Raisin In The Sun*, *Fences*. Off-Broadway and Regional: *The Piano Lesson*, *The First Breeze of Summer* (Signature Theatre), *Stickfly* (Huntington Theatre), *Every Tongue Confess* (Arena Stage), *Seven Guitars*, *Topdog/Underdog* (Two River Theater). Recent TV: *Elementary* (CBS), *Greenleaf* (OWN). Twitter/Instagram: @jasondirden.

**WENDELL B. FRANKLIN**  
*(Reggie)*

WENDELL B. FRANKLIN (Reggie). Off Broadway and Regional; *Speak Truth to Power* (Culture Project); *Brother from the Bottom*, *The Desire* (Billie Holiday Theatre); *Fences* (People's Light, Arkansas Rep); *Ruined* (La Jolla Playhouse, Huntington Theatre, Berkeley Repertory); *A Raisin in the Sun* (Virginia Stage, Weston Playhouse); *Gee's Bend* (Cleveland Playhouse). MFA: Penn State University.



**LYNDA GRAVATT**  
(Faye)

LYNDA GRAVATT (Faye). Broadway: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Doubt*, *King Hedley II*, *45 Seconds from Broadway*. Off Broadway: *The Hummingbird's Tour* (Theatre at St. Clements), *The Little Foxes* (NYTW), *Zooman and the Sign*, *King Hedley II* (Signature), *Crowns* (Second Stage), *Miss Witherspoon* (Playwrights Horizons), *Intimate Apparel* (Roundabout), *The Old Settler*, *Dividing the Estate* (Primary Stages). Regional: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* (Arena Stage, Huntington), *A Raisin in the Sun* (Chautauqua, Westport Country Playhouse, Geva Theatre, Hartford Stage), *Polk County* (McCarter, Berkeley Rep), *Crowns* (Arena Stage), *The Young Man from Atlanta* (Huntington, Alley), Humana Festival 2016 (Actors Theatre of Louisville). Television: "Elementary," "Person of Interest," "The Good Wife," "30 Rock," all the "Law & Order" series, "One Life to Live," "As The World Turns," "All My Children." Film: *The Delivery Man*, *Bounty Hunter*, *I Hate Valentine's Day*, *Who Killed Atlanta's Children?*. Three Audelco Awards, Helen Hayes Award, Connecticut Critics Circle Award. Graduate of Howard University. Proud Member of Actors Equity.

**NIKIYA MATHIS**  
(Shanita)

Off Broadway: *Fidelis*, *The Brother Sister Plays*; *In the Red & Brown Water*; *Marcus; or the Secret of Sweet*, (Public Theater); *Milk Like Sugar* (Playwrights Horizons); *Seed* (Classical Theatre of Harlem). Regional: *The Blood Quilt* (Arena Stage); *By The Way Meet Vera Stark* (Alliance Theatre); *The Mountaintop* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater); *Intimate Apparel* (Two River Theater); *Eclipsed* (McCarter Theatre); *Milk Like Sugar* (La Jolla Playhouse); *The Brother Sister Plays* (McCarter Theatre); The Continuum Company's *Romeo and Juliet* (Florence, Italy). Commercials: Diet Coke "Heart Health," Kraft Macaroni and Cheese "Pregnant," Nationwide Insurance "Atlanta Falcon's House." Television: "Braindead" (recurring), "Elementary," "Person of Interest," "Madam Secretary," "Crime." Film: *Compliance* (dir. Craig Zobel); *Knucklehead* (dir. Ben Bowman). BA: Temple University, MFA: NYU Graduate Acting.

**ADESOLA OSAKALUMI**  
(Choreography/  
Performer)

ADESOLA OSAKALUMI (Choreographer/Performer) starred in the original Broadway cast, national and international tours of *Fela! and Fela! The Concert* and the Broadway revival of *Equus* (Nugget U/S, ensemble). New York/Regional theater includes: *In Your Arms* (Old Globe Theatre), *Ngwino Ubeho* (Sundance Theatre Lab), *Eyewitness Blues* (New York Theatre Workshop), *Jam on the Groove* (Minetta Lane Theatre, Drama Desk nominee). Film includes: *Sex and the City 2*, *Crazy Beats Strong Every Time*, *The Accidental Husband*, *Across the Universe*, *Enchanted* and *Idlewild*. As a choreographer for film: *School of Rock*, *Marci X*. Commercials and theater include: Broadway Bares, ESPN, Old Navy, PBS Kids, Halifax Bank, Advil. A New York native, NEA Grant recipient and Bessie Award winner, Adesola was introduced to the performing arts by his family and believes the responsibility of an artist is to enlighten and inspire. adesola.com. Twitter: @AdesolaO

## MICHAEL CARNAHAN (Scenic Designer)

First National Tour: *A Christmas Story-The Musical*; Off-Broadway: *I and You* (59E59); *The Happiest Song Plays Last* (Second Stage); *The Piano Lesson* (Signature Theatre); *The First Breeze of Summer* (Signature Theatre); *Life Could Be A Dream*; *The Marvelous Wonderettes*; *Three Mo' Tenors*; *Pygmalion*; *Howie the Rookie*; *Brando*. Regional: Arena Stage, American Conservatory Theater, McCarter Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Pasadena Playhouse, Two River Theater, Cleveland Play House, Laguna Playhouse, Utah Shakespearean Festival, Northlight Theatre, Signature Theatre (Arlington, VA), Bucks County Playhouse, Ogunquit Playhouse, Arsht Center, Musical Theatre West, San Jose Repertory, Center Rep. Broadway (Associate Scenic Designer): *Allegiance*; *The River, Peter and The Starcatcher*; ANN: *The Ann Richards Play*; *Cyrano de Bergerac*; *The Importance of Being Earnest*; *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*; *All About Me*; *White Christmas*; *Curtains*.  
www.michaelcarnahandesign.com.

## PAUL TAZEWELL (Costume Designer)

NBC's *The Wiz!* Live. Broadway: *Hamilton*; *Dr. Zhivago*; *Side Show*; *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Tony nom); *Magic Bird: Jesus Christ Superstar*; *Lombardi*; *Memphis* (Tony nom); *Guys and Dolls*; *In The Heights* (Tony nom); *The Color Purple* (Tony nom); *Hot Feet*; *Caroline, or Change*; *A Raisin in the Sun*; *Drowning Crow*; *Bring in 'da Noise...* (Tony nom); *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*; *On the Town*; *Fascinating Rhythm*; *Def Poetry Jam*. Regional: *Side Show* (La Jolla Playhouse), *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Arena Stage). Off Broadway: *Ruined*, *In The Heights*, *McRee*, *Flesh and Blood*, *Fame*, *Boston Marriage*, *Harlem Song*. Opera: The Met, English National Opera, Washington Opera, Chicago Lyric, LA Opera, San Francisco Opera, NYC Opera, Michigan Opera Theatre. Three Helen Hayes Awards, Lucille Lortel, Jefferson, Princess Grace, and Irene Sharaff awards.

## RUI RITA (Lighting Designer)

has designed the Broadway productions of *Velocity of Autumn*; *Trip to Bountiful*; *Present Laughter*; *Dividing the Estate*; *Old Acquaintance*; *Enchanted April* among others. His Off-Broadway premieres include *Happiest Song Plays Last* (Second Stage) *Just Jim Dale* (Roundabout), *Horton Foote's Old Friends & The Orphans' Home Cycle* (Hewes Award, Signature), *Nightingale*, *Moonlight and Magnolias* (Manhattan Theatre Club), *Big Bill*, *The Carpetbagger's Children*, *Far*

*East* (Lincoln Center Theater), *The Day Emily Married* (Primary Stages), and *Dinner with Friends* (Variety Arts Center). His Off Broadway revivals include *The Piano Lesson* (Signature), *Talley's Folly & The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (Roundabout), and *Engaged* (Obie Award, Theatre for a New Audience). His recent regional credits include Alley Theatre, Arena Stage, American Conservatory Theater, Center Theatre Group, Ford's Theatre, Guthrie, Huntington Theatre Company, Shakespeare Theatre, Two River, Oregon Shakespeare, Old Globe, and Williamstown Theatre Festival.

## ROBERT KAPLOWITZ (Original Music & Sound Design)

has been designing sound and composing for 23 years, and has been honored with an OBIE for Sustained Excellence in Sound Design and a Tony® for *Fela!* His work was last heard here at the Atlantic in Lucy Thurber's *The Bottom of the World*. In NYC, he's designed on Broadway, as well as for The Public, NYTW, MCC, 2nd Stage, the Vineyard, MTC, Lincoln Center 3 and just about every 99-seat-or-smaller venue in the five boroughs. A Philadelphian since 2010, his work has been heard here at PlayPenn, Wilma, Interact, Arden, Lucidity Suitcase, Pig Iron, Lantern, PTC, Flashpoint and Azuka; other credits include the Guthrie, the Alley, Baltimore Center Stage, Sundance, the O'Neill and The National Theatre of England.

## JIMMY "J.KEYS" KEYS (Original Songs)

is a Brooklyn based emcee hailing from Detroit. His sound blends his midwest upbringing and his years of east coast experience to create his unique rhyming style. He has performed at some of NYC's most important and legendary spaces, including S.O.B's, B.B. Kings, NYC SummerStage, Santos Party House, the Blue Note, Kraine Theater, Le Poisson Rouge, the Cutting Room, and Pianos. Additionally, he's rocked stages nationally in Los Angeles, Detroit, Atlanta, and internationally in Grahamstown, South Africa, Toronto (NXNE), and London, England. He has performed on the Mainstage at A3C Festival alongside such notables as Elzhi of Slum Village, Master Ace, and Skyyzo. A deep passionate artist with a sense of humor and a sense of purpose, J. Keys is excited to be composing original works for this production and consulting the team on Detroit hip hop culture.

## NICHOLAS HUSSONG (Projections Designer)

Regional credits include *Grounded* (Alley Theatre); *Two Trains Running* (Arden Theatre Company); *These Paper Bullets!* (Atlantic Theater Company,

Geffen Playhouse, Yale Rep); *The Mountaintop* (Playmakers Rep); *I Saw My Neighbor on the Train and I Didn't Even Smile* (Berkshire Theatre Group), as well as productions with Abrons Art Center, Premieres NYC, Ars Nova, Heartbeat Opera, Joe's Pub, Nashville Symphony, Hartford Symphony, I am a Boys Choir, SummerWorks Toronto and La MaMa Summer Share. Nicholas was the Artistic Associate at Triad Stage in Greensboro, North Carolina where he continues to design new works based on Appalachian life written by Preston Lane. Nickhussong.com.

## LAURA WILSON (Production Stage Manager)

Broadway: *All The Way*, *First Date*, *A Free Man of Color*, *The People in the Picture*. Off-Broadway: *Exit Strategy* (Primary Stages), *The Really Big Once*, *A Family of Perhaps Three* (Target Margin Theater). Tour: *Soul Doctor*. Regional: *Bull Durham* (Alliance Theatre); August Wilson's *Seven Guitars*, Ruben Santiago-Hudson's *Your Blues Ain't Sweet Like Mine*, *Third* (Two River Theater); *Period of Adjustment* (Dir. by David Auburn), *Moonchildren* (Dir. by Karen Allen), *A Thousand Clowns* (Berkshire Theatre Festival); *Guys and Dolls* (Riverside Theatre); *The Three Sisters*, *The Boys From Syracuse*, and Naomi Wallace's *Things of Dry Hours* (Centerstage, Baltimore); Lydia R. Diamond's *Stick Fly*, Lee Blessing's *Lonesome Hollow*, Richard Dresser's *A View Of The Harbor* (Contemporary American Theater Festival); Tom Stoppard's *On the Razzle* (Clarence Brown Theatre); *All In The Timing*, *Mac Wellman's School For Devils* (The Hangar Theatre).

## KELLY ICE (Assistant Stage Manager)

Off-Broadway: *Skeleton Crew* (ATC - Stage 2), *Between Riverside and Crazy* (ATC), *Nora* (Cherry Lane), *Gloria* (Vineyard), *Little Children Dream of God* (Roundabout Underground), *Queen of the Night* (Variety Worldwide), *Here Lies Love* (The Public Theater), *The Last Seder* (Rosalind Productions, Inc.), *Sleep No More* (Punchdrunk/Emersive), *Double Falsehood* (CSC), *The Road To Qatar* (York Theatre), *Secrets of the Trade*, *Happy Now?* (Primary Stages), *My Big Gay Italian Wedding*, *Spirit Control* (MTC), *Coraline* (MCC). New York: *At Home Abroad*, *Arms and the Girl* (UnSung Musicals), *Smile* (Singing OnStage), *Deadline*, *Sarah At Noon*, *The Wife* (Lark Play Development Center), *The Boys Upstairs* (FringeNYC, Encore Series, & FringeBENEFITS). Regional: *Tell Me On A Sunday*, *Wait Until Dark* (Surflight Theatre), *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (Fulton Theatre), *Sisters of Swing* (PA Centre Stage). Tours: *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* Arena Tour. Fundraising/

Charity events with BC/EFA, Broadway Dreams Foundations, ASTEP, The Actors Fund. PSU Graduate. Proud AEA member.

## CAPARELLIOTIS CASTING (casting)

Current Broadway: *Blackbird* and *The Father*. Recent and Select Broadway/Off-Broadway: *An Act of God*, *Fish in the Dark*, *It's Only a Play*, *Airline Highway*, *Disgraced*, *Sex with Strangers*, *Lost Lake*, *The Country House*, *Casa Valentina*, *Holler if Ya Hear Me*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Fences*. Also: MTC, 2nd Stage, LCT3, Ars Nova, Old Globe, Goodman, Arena, McCarter and others. Film/television: "American Odyssey" (NBC), "How to Get Away With Murder" pilot (ABC), "Ironside" pilot (NBC), "Steel Magnolias" (Sony for Lifetime).

## ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION (“Equity”)

founded in 1913, is the US labor union that represents more than 50,000 actors and stage managers. Equity seeks to foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of society and advances the careers of its members by negotiating wages, working conditions and providing a wide range of benefits including health and pension plans. Actors' Equity is a member of the AFL-CIO and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. #EquityWorks

## THE SUNDANCE INSTITUTE

The Sundance Institute Theatre Program advances the work of risk-taking theatre artists by providing developmental opportunities that support artists throughout their careers. Dedicated to meeting the changing needs of both established and emerging theater-makers, the program offers support for those creating unique and compelling work for the stage in its Labs and Retreats. Recent plays and musicals supported by the program include Annie Baker's *Circle Mirror Transformation*, Dominique Morisseau's *Skeleton Crew*, Doug Wright's *Posterity*, Stew's *Passing Strange*, Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins' *Appropriate*, and *Fun Home* by Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori.

## **Section III: Your Students As Audience**

Theater Vocabulary

Relating Themes to  
Our Own Lives:

*Anatomy of Detroit's  
Decline*

*Playwright Dominique  
Morisseau Can't Forget  
the Motor City*

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 *Skeleton Crew*.

## 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

Power  
Masculinity/Femininity  
Race  
Social Justice  
“A Cog in a Machine”  
Worker’s Rights  
Sacrifice  
Loyalty  
Desperation  
The Greater Good  
Pride/Ownership

## Discussion Questions

In Act I, Faye shares this advice with Dez:

“...Told you don’t be listening to rumors. You inhale every rumor you clog up your lungs. Die of asphyxiation of other people’s bullshit.”

Do you agree with Faye’s observation?  
Disagree? Why or why not?

## 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

## **Anatomy of Detroit's Decline**

by Amy Padnani  
produced by Jacky Myint  
*The New York Times*  
December 27, 2013

## **Playwright Dominique Morisseau Can't Forget the Motor City**

By Alexis Soloski  
*The New York Times*  
December 30, 2015



LYNDA GRAVATT in *Skeleton Crew*. Photo Credit: Ahron R. Foster

# ANATOMY OF DETROIT'S DECLINE

by Amy Padnani | produced by Jacky Myint | December 27, 2013 | The New York Times

**In a matter of decades, Detroit went from one of America's most prosperous cities to one of its most distressed. Here is a look at how the collapse of this metropolis – battered by financial missteps, racial tensions and leadership lapses – culminated in insurmountable debt that led the city to file for bankruptcy.**



A workman adjusted a Ford Mustang at the final assembly line in a Detroit-area factory on Nov. 6, 1967. Preston Stroup/Associated Press

## RELIANCE ON A SINGLE INDUSTRY

The expansion of the auto industry nearly a century ago fueled a growth spurt that made Detroit the fourth largest city in the country. By 1950, the population peaked at almost 1.85 million as people moved to Detroit to work at the Big Three auto companies: Ford, General Motors and Chrysler. But it was at the height of this prosperity that the manufacturers began to restructure, and the risks of the city's reliance on a single industry became apparent, according to Thomas J. Sugrue's essay "Motor City: The Story of Detroit."

First, there was decentralization. Strikes, inspired by union negotiations and a refusal by blacks and whites to work side by side, were halting progress, according to "Detroit, Race and Uneven Development," co-written by Joe T. Darden. Factories were built in the suburbs and in neighboring states so that if there was a protest in one factory, work could still continue elsewhere. But as the factories spread out, so too did the job opportunities.

When the industry then experimented with automation, replacing assembly-line jobs with machinery, tens of thousands of jobs were lost. The industry shrank even more during the energy crisis in the 1970s and the economic recession in the 1980s. And foreign competition caused profits to plummet.

As auto jobs moved elsewhere and the region aged, Detroit's labor costs — retiree health care costs, especially — increased substantially.

Though other cities experienced their own booms and busts, Detroit suffered more because it didn't diversify, said Kevin Boyle, a Detroit historian who has written extensively about his native city. Places such as Chicago and Pittsburgh relied on other areas — like banking or education — beyond the industries that started their success.

The auto industry "was like Silicon Valley in the 1980s," Mr. Boyle said. It was doing so well, he said, that Detroit officials didn't see a need to do anything differently.



A National Guardsman in Detroit during the riots of 1967. Associated Press

## RACIAL TENSIONS

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Tensions between the races have been high since the 1940s, when Southern blacks began moving to Detroit in search of work at automobile factories, said Mr. Boyle, the historian.

As the migration of blacks who swept into Detroit became especially intense, middle-class whites began moving to the newly built suburbs. But violent 1967 riots turned this stream into a torrent.

“It’s really hard to overstate how deep the fear was, on both sides of the color line,” Mr. Boyle said.

And after the riots, Detroit failed to bounce back, Mr. Boyle said. Businesses followed their customers. Thousands of houses were abandoned as the city’s population plunged.

“In some cities like Chicago, Boston and maybe New York, people say to themselves, ‘I want to be in this

neighborhood where I grew up, where my grandparents live or where my synagogue is’ — that really roots people in place,” he said. “Detroit didn’t work that way.”

During the 1950s, the city lost 363,000 white residents while it gained 182,000 black residents. In 1950, the population was 16 percent black, and by the time of the 1967 riot it had grown to a third. Today, about 82 percent of the city’s population is black.

The Rev. Charles Williams II, who leads the Detroit chapter of the National Action Network, said little had been done to ease tensions. Those strained relations have hindered the city’s efforts toward economic progress.

“Race has basically been used as a tool to pit people against each other,” he said. “There’s a sincere, in-depth hate. Folks in the city have been taught to not trust those in the suburbs. Folks in the suburbs don’t trust those in the city.”



Mayor Coleman A. Young of Detroit at an event in 1980. Richard Sheinwald/Associated Press

## SHORTCOMINGS OF LEADERSHIP

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The financial crisis facing Detroit was decades in the making, caused in part by a trail of missteps, suspected corruption and inaction. Here is a sampling of some city leaders who trimmed too little, too late and, rather than tackling problems head on, hoped that deep-rooted structural problems would turn out to be cyclical downturns.

**Charles E. Bowles**, backed by the Ku Klux Klan, was in office for seven months in 1930 before people demanded his removal. His ascension to the mayor's office was followed by a spike in crime, and he was suspected to be linked to some of Detroit's underworld figures, according to "Detroit: A Biography" by Scott Martelle. "The stories of gangland feuds and killings were diversions from the deeper agony that spread across Detroit in the 1930s," Mr. Martelle wrote. "Unemployment was high and deep poverty endemic."

**Edward Jeffries**, who served as mayor from 1940 to 1948, developed the Detroit Plan, which involved razing 100 blighted acres and preparing the land for redevelopment. The area sat vacant for several years, and the 7,000 black residents who were displaced moved to neighboring areas where whites, in turn, left. Rather than ending blight, the project simply redistributed it.

**Albert Cobo** was considered a candidate of the wealthy and of the white during his tenure from 1950 to 1957. He declined federal money for housing projects and facilitated the construction of freeways. Highways were being built across the country that encouraged suburbanization, but while the rest of the nation was expanding, Detroit's population was shrinking as people used the newly built roadways to leave.

# SHORTCOMINGS OF LEADERSHIP *(continued)*

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**Coleman A. Young** was seen as a divisive figure in the 20 years he served as mayor. He won his first mayoral election in 1973, largely on the promise to ease tension between the police and black residents. But while many blacks saw him as a hero who pledged to fight crime, some whites felt he wasn't looking out for their interests. Mr. Young seemingly breezed to second, third and fourth terms without making the expected bridge-building racial appeals. Isabel Wilkerson, writing in *The New York Times* in 1989, said the mayor, running in a city in which 70 percent of the voters were black, seemed "to revel in the sort of polarization that other politicians dread." Though Mr. Young was credited with revitalizing the waterfront, the rest of downtown was often compared to a war zone, with neighborhoods crumbling, businesses boarded up and poverty remaining high.

**Kwame M. Kilpatrick**, who led Detroit from 2001 to 2008, was nicknamed the "hip-hop mayor" when first elected at 31, in part for his larger-than-life persona, flashy suits and the diamond stud in his ear. He brought new attractions to the city's riverfront and much-needed business investment downtown, but he also increased the city's debt obligations to fill budget gaps. After a series of scandals he resigned in 2008 and pleaded guilty later that year to obstruction of justice charges, served four months in jail and was ordered to pay \$1 million to the city. He was behind bars two years later for hiding assets from the court, and in October he was sentenced to 28 years in prison after he was found guilty of racketeering, fraud and extortion.

**Dave Bing**, a former professional basketball star, took office in 2009 pledging to solve Detroit's fiscal problems, which by then were already overwhelming. During his term, there were numerous announcements of cuts to the city's work force, efforts to fill annual budget deficits and urgent calls for sacrifices from labor groups. Then in March the state appointed Kevyn D. Orr, a veteran lawyer, as an emergency manager to oversee the city's operations, rendering Mr. Bing virtually powerless. Mr. Bing announced in May that he would not run for re-election. And in November Mike Duggan, a former hospital executive who campaigned with the backing of Detroit's business leaders, was elected mayor.

# LACK OF AN EFFICIENT TRANSIT SYSTEM

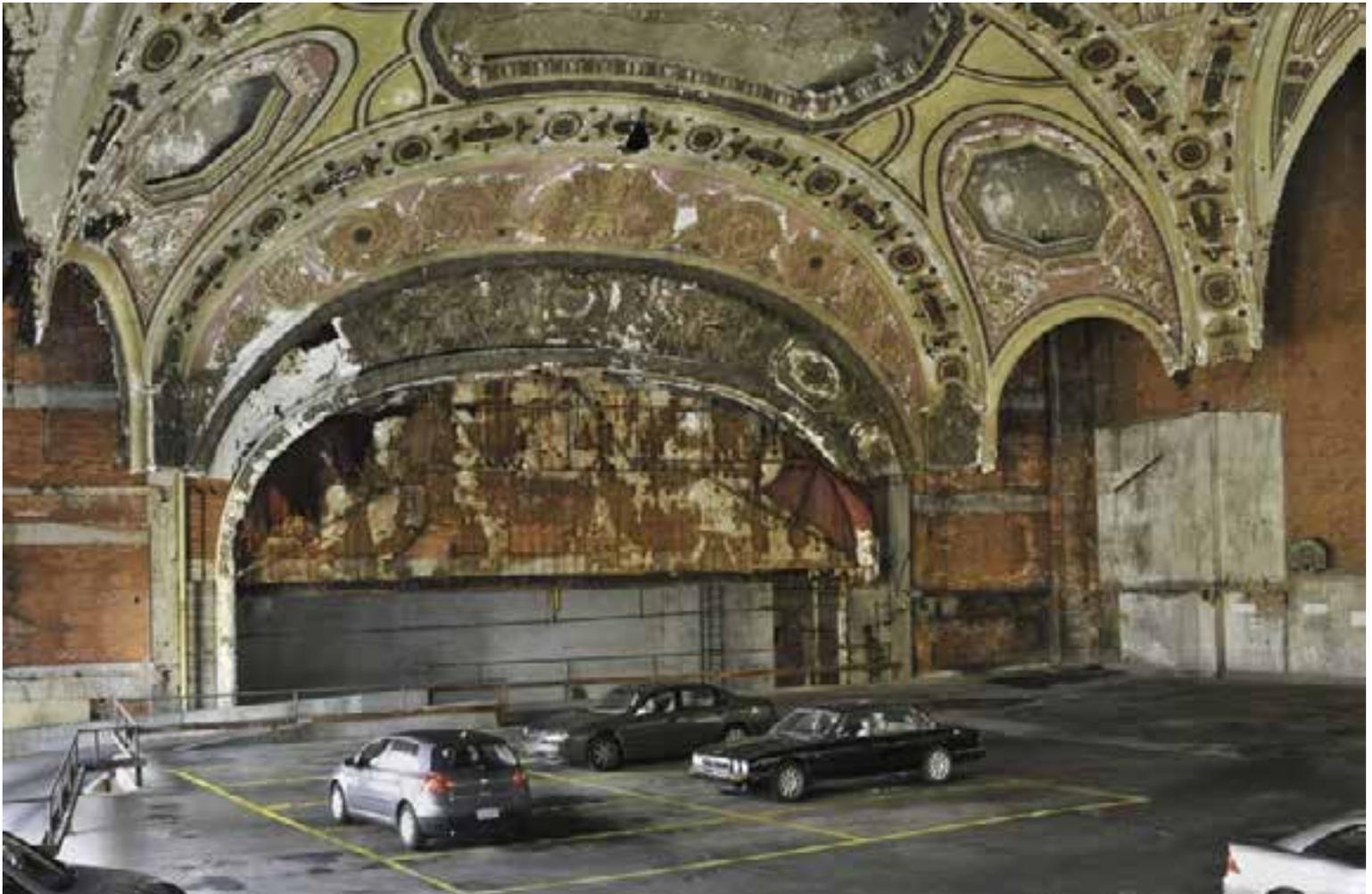
In the hometown of the auto industry, public policies encouraged a car culture, with more money being invested in building highways rather than a public transportation system.

Efforts like Dwight D. Eisenhower's Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 helped fuel urban sprawl, and the city's streetcar system was dismantled the same year. In the 1980s, with federal aid, the city built its People Mover, a monorail that looped around three miles in the downtown area. The project was criticized as not being cost effective, as it primarily serviced visitors to restaurants or the stadium rather than helping the city's residents get around effectively. Though there is a bus system, it is thought to be unreliable, said Mr. Williams of the National Action Network, a Detroit native. A light-rail system, backed in part by corporate donors, is slated to begin operating in early 2016.

"It's almost like two Detroits," Mr. Williams said. "The light rail will go up to West Grand Boulevard, where all the development is taking place. The other side is where the poverty is."

Without an efficient mode of transportation over the past few decades, blacks and whites didn't travel side by side as they did in other cities, a missed opportunity to ease racial tensions, said Mr. Boyle, the historian.

"It makes a difference that you have to sit in a subway car or a bus with people who are of different races and different ethnicities, different ages different classes," he said. "It creates a sense of connection, even if it's just a superficial one."



Detroit's once-glamorous Michigan Theater, which is now used as a parking garage. Sean Doerr/WNET.org



Shuttered homes and businesses lined a street in downtown Detroit in 2008. Spencer Platt/Getty Images

## IMPACT OF POVERTY

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Officials are now faced with trying to shrink the city, a complicated task because dilapidated homes and empty lots are speckled throughout neighborhoods rather than consolidated in convenient chunks.

About 36 percent of the city's population is below the poverty level, and, by 2010, the residential vacancy rate was 27.8 percent. With fewer people paying taxes, the city has starved financially and has struggled to maintain social services. Swaths of the city are in total darkness because of non-functioning street lights. And the average police response time, including top priority calls, is 58 minutes, according to a report by the emergency manager.

The student enrollment at Detroit's public schools has drastically declined to 52,981 in 2012 from 164,496 in 2002, according to Michelle A. Zdrodowski, a spokeswoman for the district. In response, several school buildings have been shuttered.

Poverty has been exacerbated by middle-class black families' moving to the suburbs to pursue jobs or better schools, and to escape crime. Meanwhile, the city's

poor have stayed in Detroit. The city's unemployment rate is about 19 percent, but the lack of a transportation system has prevented residents from commuting to jobs elsewhere. A plan to cut retiree pensions, which some estimate account for \$3.5 billion of the city's \$18 billion in debt, could worsen the lives of some.

As the city works to reinvent itself, it has drawn a community of artists and young people with big dreams of a total makeover for Detroit. Mr. Williams said the challenge was to make sure longtime residents were included in the movement.

"The people who are living in the city of Detroit, who have been holding on," he said, "they should be a part of the progress."

**Research contributed by SUSAN C. BEACHY**

**Additional Sources:**

**Scott Martelle, "Detroit: A Biography" (2012)**

**Darden, Joe T., "Detroit, Race and Uneven Development" (1987)**

# PLAYWRIGHT DOMINIQUE MORISSEAU CAN'T FORGET THE MOTOR CITY

By Alexis Soloski | December 30, 2015 | *The New York Times*



A few years ago, the playwright Dominique Morisseau and her husband, the musician James Keys, traveled back home for a wedding. On their way into the reception, they saw a woman sitting in a car packed with possessions. When they left, she was still there. Knocking on her window, they asked if they could help. The woman accepted some money and told them she'd be all right. "It's a rough time right now, but I'm going to get through it," Ms. Morisseau recalled her saying.

She and her husband then drove away, upset by the conversation. "It felt perverted," said Ms. Morisseau, 37, who like her husband was born and raised in Detroit. "This is the Motor City. This is where people make cars. Now it's become a city where people are living in their cars."

She already had many friends and relatives affected by factory closings or house foreclosures. From their stories and from that encounter, she started to construct "Skeleton Crew," the final play in her prizewinning Detroit trilogy, which begins previews on Wednesday, Jan. 6, at the Atlantic Theater Company. Set in 2008, it centers on several workers and a manager in the last small auto plant standing.

Ms. Morisseau's plays include the earlier entries in the trilogy, "Detroit '67," which was staged at the Public Theater and won the Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama, and "Paradise Blue," which is set in 1949 and played the Williamstown Theater Festival last summer. "Sunset Baby," a contemporary play about a father jailed for activities in the black power movement and his grifter daughter, was produced by the Labyrinth Theater Company in 2013.

Her plays are both angry and empathetic, forthright about the faults of the characters they describe while ready to honor their desire, ambition and essential decency. "I can't write a story until I know what my characters are willing to fight or die for," she said on a recent evening after rehearsal, a few days before Christmas. "Then I know who they are."

"This is where people make cars," Dominique Morisseau said of Detroit. "Now it's become a city where people are living in their cars." Credit: Ramsay de Give for *The New York Times*

Ms. Morisseau often wears her hair piled atop her head and has a penchant for hoop earrings nearly as big as dessert plates. On this night, she wore a sweatshirt from the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center over a pink T-shirt emblazoned "Soul Detroit."

You can hear echoes of August Wilson in her work, of Lorraine Hansberry, of Tennessee Williams, of Anton Chekhov, but also a voice — seductive, poetic, comic, tough — that is unmistakably her own. Her plays overflow with sensory detail: the music that excites and soothes her characters, how they dance, what they wear, what they eat.

And as befits a writer who just finished a season on Showtime's "Shameless," a series that wrings comedy from poverty, her plays have an acute focus on economics — who is living large, who is living out of a car, what it costs (financially and otherwise) just to get by.

Ms. Morisseau, who now splits her time between apartments in Bedford-Stuyvesant and North Hollywood, is a persuasive speaker who used to pay her rent with her winnings from performance poetry slams. She is outspoken, too. In her acceptance speech for a Steinberg Playwright Award in November, she thanked the committee for "allowing our rages to not be criminalized or become tools of shame."

She recently published an essay on the website for American Theater magazine called "Why I Almost Slapped a Fellow Theater Patron, and What That Says About Our Theaters." A white woman who had donated a ticket to Ms. Morisseau tried to quiet her enthusiastic response to a play. After the show, the two had an argument. Asked why she hadn't sought to calm or defuse the encounter, Ms. Morisseau, in a follow-up phone conversation, replied: "People are always asking people of color to have some kind of superhuman patience. That is not reasonable."

Ms. Morisseau grew up in the College Park neighborhood of Detroit, in the same house where her parents still live. (This is the first year she didn't make it back for Christmas, a consequence of the rehearsal schedule.) She performed in plays at her father's church and danced with her aunt's troupe, the Detroit City Dance Company. She developed a crush on Shakespeare in middle school and starred in musicals throughout high school.

But when she arrived at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, just 40 miles from home, she encountered a theater department "that did not do a lot of nontraditional casting," she said. Roles in campus plays were few, and she had to dig to find acceptable work for her scene study classes. Eager to create a role for herself, and having read, she admitted, a little too much Ntozake Shange, she wrote and directed her first play, "The Blackness Blues — Time to Change the Tune (A Sister's Story)." What was intended

as a three-character piece soon swelled to a cast of 20 as African-American women from all departments clamored for a chance to represent themselves onstage. "I had dancers. I had extras. I had people just walk onstage and just do nothing," she said.

Even now she tries to remember that model. "Everybody needs to see themselves," she said. "We have to make space."

Still, it took her several years to return to playwriting. After graduation, she moved to New York and danced, briefly, but soon decided she would never be a star. (She may underrate herself. A video of her wedding dance, to an eight-minute medley ranging from hip-hop to boogie-woogie to "(I've Had) The Time of My Life," has half a million hits on YouTube.) For a while, she made the performance poetry scene, until she started to feel that her art was suffering. "I was just writing poetry to win slams," she said.

She began working with the Creative Arts Team at City College, creating educational theater highlighting social issues. Lin-Manuel Miranda, the writer and star of "Hamilton," was one former colleague. Inspired by her peers, she began writing one-act plays, which eventually gave her the confidence to try a full-length, "Follow Me to Nellie's," based on an aunt who had run a brothel in Natchez, Miss. In 2011, she joined the Emerging Writers Group at the Public Theater, where she first conceived the Detroit trilogy.

She'd been reading August Wilson's 10-play cycle. She got chills, she said, thinking about how people from Pittsburgh must feel when they encounter that work. "They have to feel so documented, so like they matter," she said. "They have to feel so important. And I wanted to do that for Detroit." Ten plays seemed like a lot, but she thought she could manage three.

Sometimes, in the first two plays particularly, the demands of plot overwhelm the characters and environments Ms. Morisseau creates. (Though, really, you could say the same of Chekhov.) Ms. Morisseau doesn't necessarily see this as a fault. "I don't know why we are so scared of drama," she said. "I love the drama. The more dramatic the better. I want to scream with the actors."

The actors want to scream right back, joyfully. Lynda Gravatt, who has known Ms. Morisseau since her student days and who played the lead in "Follow Me to Nellie's," underwent a quadruple bypass last summer. But she wouldn't let a little thing like heart surgery stop her from starring in "Skeleton Crew."

"I'm always very eager to go when she calls," Ms. Gravatt said. "Because I know there will be something for me to put my teeth into. The work is so tantalizing."

In "Skeleton Crew," Ms. Morisseau immersed herself in the music of the factories and the choreography of the assembly line. "It's beautiful," she said. "It's fricking theatrical; it's gorgeous."

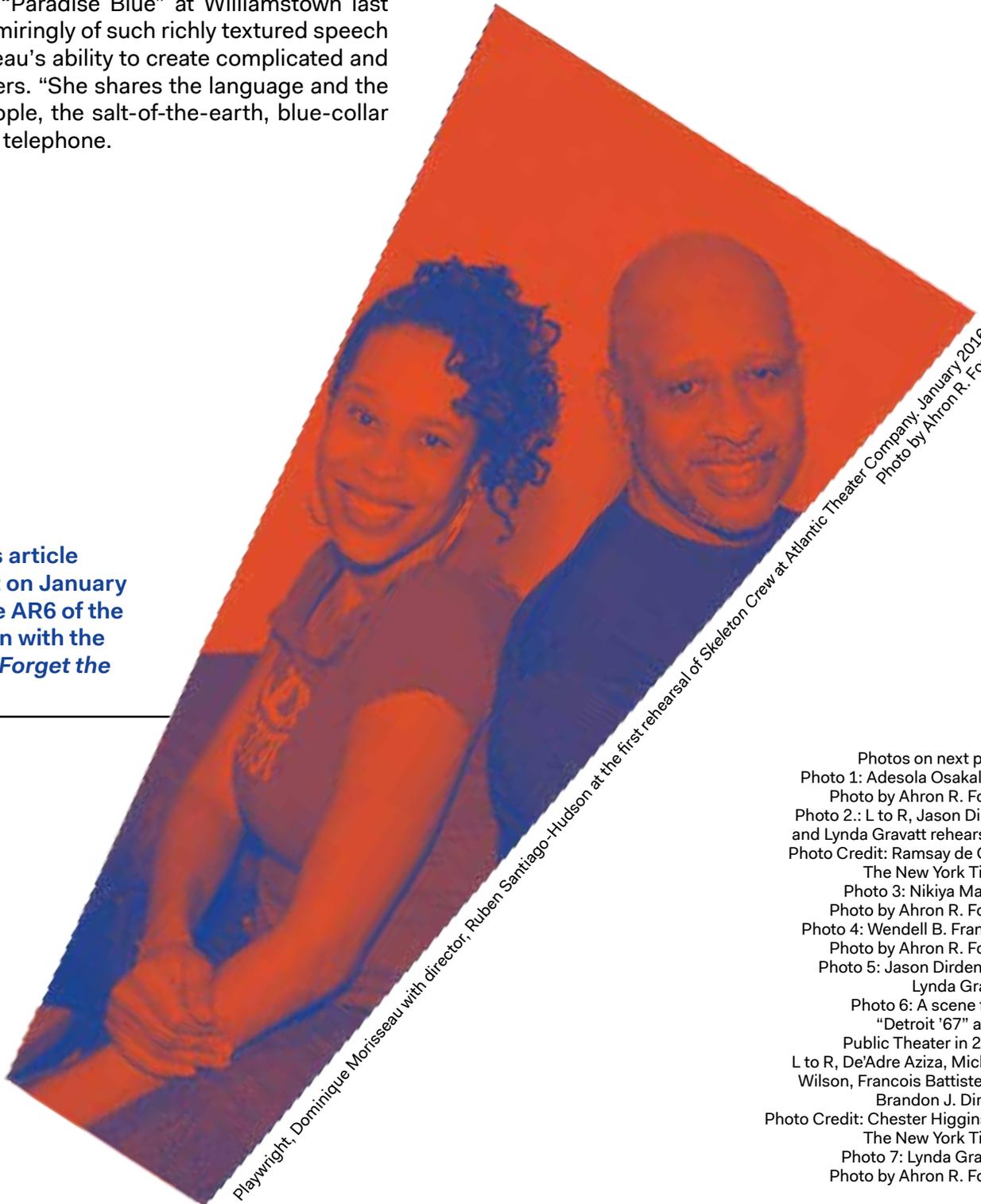
Faye, the seasoned worker played by Ms. Gravatt, speaks of her connection to the plant. "The walls talk to me," Faye says. "The dust on the floors write me messages. I'm in the vents. I'm in the bulletin boards. I'm in the chipped paint. Ain't nobody can slip through the cracks past me up in here."

Ruben Santiago-Hudson, who directs "Skeleton Crew" and also directed "Paradise Blue" at Williamstown last summer, spoke admiringly of such richly textured speech and of Ms. Morisseau's ability to create complicated and absorbing characters. "She shares the language and the rhythms of the people, the salt-of-the-earth, blue-collar people," he said by telephone.

Ms. Morisseau has made it a mission to put onstage people of a race and class and type that much mainstream theater might ignore or demonize. The characters of "Skeleton Crew" include an unmarried pregnant woman, a gun-packing young man, a middle-age homeless woman. She has compassion for all of them, these fusions of aunts and uncles, of cousins and friends, the people she remembers from her upbringing and those she's barely glimpsed on the street, people who are, she said, "being monstified by the rest of the country."

"I love them and I want to write them," she said.

A version of this article appears in print on January 3, 2016, on page AR6 of the New York edition with the headline: *Don't Forget the Motor City.*



Playwright, Dominique Morisseau with director, Ruben Santiago-Hudson at the first rehearsal of Skeleton Crew at Atlantic Theater Company, January 2016. Photo by Ahron R. Foster.

- Photos on next page:
- Photo 1: Adesola Osakalumi. Photo by Ahron R. Foster
- Photo 2.: L to R, Jason Dirden and Lynda Gravatt rehearsing. Photo Credit: Ramsay de Give, The New York Times
- Photo 3: Nikiya Mathis. Photo by Ahron R. Foster
- Photo 4: Wendell B. Franklin. Photo by Ahron R. Foster
- Photo 5: Jason Dirden and Lynda Gravatt
- Photo 6: A scene from "Detroit '67" at the Public Theater in 2013. L to R, De'Adre Aziza, Michelle Wilson, Francois Battiste and Brandon J. Dirden. Photo Credit: Chester Higgins Jr., The New York Times
- Photo 7: Lynda Gravatt. Photo by Ahron R. Foster



# **Section IV: Your Students As Actors**

Reading a Scene for  
Understanding

Practical Aesthetics  
Exercise

Mini-Lesson Vocabulary

Scene Analysis

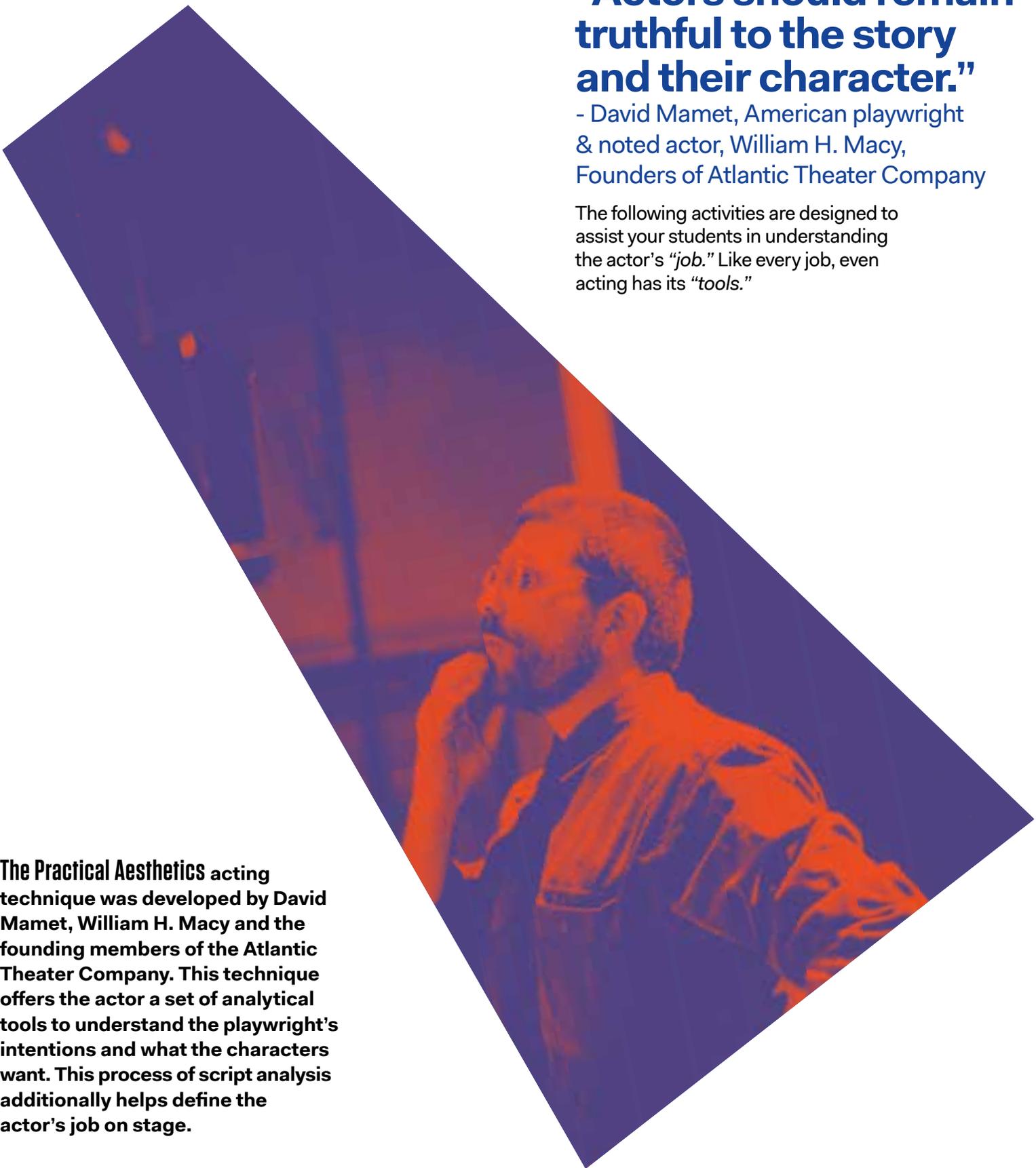
Worksheet



## “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 *Skeleton Crew*, 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 22 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 *SKELETON CREW*

**REGGIE** Was um... lookin' for you cuz I needed to talk...if you had a sec.  
*[Faye eyes Reggie intensely.]*

**FAYE** *[not a question]* They shuttin' us down, ain't they.

**REGGIE** How you---

**FAYE** I know you Reggie. Can read your face. Been lookin' stressed for a week and then some.  
*[beat]* When you find out?

**REGGIE** Last week. Harris pulled me into his office.

**FAYE** Fuck.  
*[Pause.]*

**FAYE** When they letting everybody know?

**REGGIE** H-R is sending out the notice as soon details are final.

**FAYE** How soon this happenin'?

**REGGIE** Within the year, Faye.

**FAYE** *[sobering]* FUCK.  
*Another Pause.*

**FAYE** I hit thirty years at the end of the year. In October. We gonna be around that long?

**REGGIE** Ain't sure.

**FAYE** *[almost to herself]* Retirement package be real different for 29 years versus 30.

**REGGIE** I know. I'm thinking on it. Was coming to talk to you. Get the scoop on folks. See what I might be able to figure out for everybody before the news hits. Cuz once it does... ..

**FAYE** What you gonna do? What about Cheryl and the kids?

**REGGIE** I've been trying to figure that out. I only got 15 years on me.

**FAYE** But you in a supervisory position. They gonna find you another job. Place you somewhere else.

**REGGIE** Dalina just started high school. Got to save up for her college. And we just bought that house over in Sherwood. Couldn't hardly believe we could afford it. But we got it, Faye. It's ours.

**FAYE** I know it.

**REGGIE** I own something that can't nobody take from me. That mean somethin'.

**FAYE** It does. Means a lot.

**REGGIE** Now you can't say nothin' about this. I'll lose my job. You know that right?

**FAYE** I know you don't expect me to sit on this. That's not what you was coming to ask me.

**REGGIE** I was coming for your help. To work with you and figure out what we can do to soften this blow. But you can't go taking this to the Union yet. I need you to wait and let the company do this right.

**FAYE** Do this right? Only right way is straight up. I'm still the Rep. It's my job to protect these folks.

**REGGIE** Faye, I'm confiding in you. I'm putting myself on the line for you cuz I'm on your side. But I need you on mine. I need your guidance. Help me figure this out without sounding the alarm.

**FAYE** Reggie--

**REGGIE** Please Faye

# 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 FAYE...

## IF YOU'RE PLAYING REGGIE...

**What is my character literally doing?**

Faye is literally talking to Reggie about what the fate for the factory workers will be after the plant pulls the plug.

Reggie is literally talking to Faye about how he should handle the news of the plant closing down.

**What does my character want?**

Faye wants Reggie to understand that she must do what's right for the workers.

Reggie wants Faye to use her delegate powers to defuse any rumors of the factory shutting down.

**What is the action I'm going to play?**

To get someone to recognize an important truth.

To get someone to make a sacrifice.

**The As-If...**

It's as-if my best friend, David, wants me to cover for him and say that he is staying at my house when he is actually going on a trip he was forbidden to go on.

As if my job relocated to Cleveland and I asked my girlfriend, Sarah, to give up her glamorous NYC life to live with me in Ohio.

**Section V:  
Your Students  
As Artists**

Creative Response Activity

Creative Writing Activity

Challenging The Plot

Common Core &  
DOE Theater Blueprint



# “Create your own work.”

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



JASON DIRDEN and NIKIYA MATHIS in Atlantic's *Skeleton Crew*. Photo Credit: Ahron R. Foster. January 2016

**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 *Skeleton Crew* and how to relate that moment to an individual creative response.

## Student Goal

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

## Step One

Divide the students into pairs, asking them to read the final scene of *Skeleton Crew* on the next page.

## Step Two

Ask students to break down the scene using the Atlantic Acting Technique on page 28.

Literal

Want

Action

As-If

## Step Three

Ask students to divide into pairs to break down the scene.

## Step Four

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

# A SCENE FROM *SKELETON CREW*

**FAYE** Dez a good worker.

**REGGIE** I know it.

**FAYE** Stubborn , but a good worker.

**REGGIE** I know it Faye

**FAYE** Don't do it Reggie. Don't let 'em do it.

**REGGIE** I'm trying --- I just can't--- [*beat*] You know what Cheryl told me the other day when I come home?

**FAYE** What's that.

**REGGIE** I look like I'm disappearing from myself.

**FAYE** You got a lotta stress. I'm tired of hearin' that. You ain't in a easy position.

**REGGIE** I'm sick of walking that line.

**FAYE** What line?

**REGGIE** Line that say I'm over here and you over there and even though we started with the same dirt on our shoes....I'm supposed to pretend like you ain't more than an employee ID number. Like I don't know what happens out there when you leave these plant grounds. Why every man feels the need to arm himself before he walks into the grocery store or drops his kids off at school. Like I don't know the fear that's come over all of us lately. Walk around with your manhood on the line cuz you never know who's gonna try to take it from you. Cuz you never know when you're gonna be the next one out there, desperate and needin' to feed your family by any means necessary. I know Dez well, Faye. I look him in the eye and he scares the shit outta me. Cuz that invisible line between us.... it's thin as hell.

**FAYE** We all walk that line. Any moment any one of us could be the other. That's just the shit about life. One minute you passin' the woman on the freeway holdin' up the "will work for food "sign. Next minute, you sleepin' in your car, damn near...

# POST-THEATER CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITY

## Teacher Objective

To develop critical thinking skills and emotional literacy through examining the characters in *Skeleton Crew* 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

Write the names of all the characters on the board and go through them with the students so they remember who is who.

## Step Two

Instruct students to write a letter as if they are one of the characters. They should take on the persona of another character.

**Example:** Dez writes to Shanita explaining why being a part of Shanita's world is important to him.

## Step Three

Encourage students to ask questions, to offer advice, to share their true feelings about that character's choices, etc. Really allow students to think freely.

## Step Four

Ask the students to share their letters for constructive feedback and discussion of the themes and issues of the play.

# POST-THEATER CHALLENGING THE PLOT

## Teacher Objective

To develop critical thinking skills by challenging the plot of *Skeleton Crew*.

## Student Goal

To understand that examining a story backwards and forwards, you can see that each event was caused by something that happened prior, but by examining it forwards, there is no way of knowing what can happen.

## Materials

Pencils, pens, writing paper.

## Step One

In pairs the students create their own alternate ending, starting from the following closing line:

### REGGIE

On the floor everybody. Got a full day today. Only way to get through it is to work together. Let's go.

## Step Two

**Follow up:** Ask the students to share their scene between Reggie and Dez or Dez and Shanita as they exit the break room.

Ask the students to consider how Reggie and Dez' or Dez and Shanita's' relationship looks five minutes later, two days later, and a month later.

Allow the students to arrange their scene in chronological order to show the evolution of the relationships

# 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 what "life as a cog in a machine" is like as opposed to having free will?

Do you accept the concept put forward in *Skeleton Crew* that workplace ethics and an individual's ethics can reinforce or contradict one another?

## 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