

STUDY GUIDE:
Students & Educators

World Premiere Play

**THE LAST
OF THE
LOVE
LETTERS**

By Ngozi Anyanwu
Directed by
Patricia McGregor



Mary McCann
School Executive Director

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ATLANTIC THEATER COMPANY

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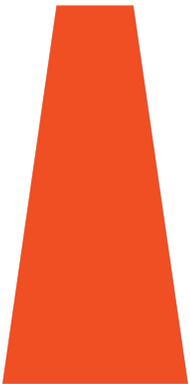
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SECTION I: THE PLAY

Synopsis

Themes



SYNOPSIS

*two people contemplate the thing they love the most
and whether
to stick it out
or to leave it behind
to stay
or
to go
that is the question
the last of the love letters
is just that
a plea
and a painful goodbye wrapped into one*

THEMES

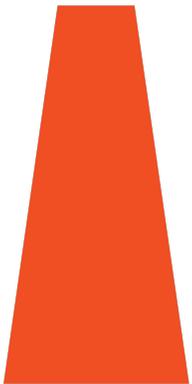
Love
Loss
Isolation
Reflection

SECTION II: CREATIVE TEAM

Creative Biographies

Characters/Cast List

Behind the Scenes Look



CREATIVE BIOGRAPHIES



NGOZI ANYANWU (*Playwright, You*) is a playwright, storyteller, and most recently a 2020 Steinberg Playwright Award winner. Previous productions include *Good Grief* (Vineyard Theatre in NYC / Center Theatre Group in LA) and *The Homecoming Queen* (sold-out world premiere run at Atlantic Theater Company). *Good Grief* was on the Kilroys List 2016 and a semifinalist for the Princess Grace Award, and won the Humanitas Award. *The Homecoming Queen* was on the Kilroys List 2017 and was a Leah Ryan Finalist. Her play *Nike...* (Kilroys List 2017) was workshopped at The New Black Fest in conjunction with The Lark and The Strand Festival in conjunction with A.C.T and Space on Ryder Farm. Ngozi also has commissions with NYU, The Old Globe, Two Rivers Theatre, Atlantic Theater, and Steppenwolf. Anyanwu has also received residencies from LCT3, Space on Ryder Farm, the Djerassi Resident Artists Program, The New Harmony Project, New York Stage and Film, and Page 73. She attended Point Park University (BA) and received her MFA in Acting from University of California, San Diego.



PATRICIA MCGREGOR (*Director, she/her/hers*). Born in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, Patricia McGregor is a director and writer working in theater, TV/film, and music. McGregor has twice been profiled by *The New York Times* for her direction of world premieres. Productions include *Lights Out: Nat "King" Cole* (co-writer and director, Geffen Playhouse, People's Light); *Sisters In Law* (Wallis Annenberg); *What You Are, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Measure for Measure* (The Old Globe); *Skeleton Crew* (Geffen Playhouse, Studio Theater); *Good Grief* (Center Theater Group); *Hamlet* (The Public Theater); *Place* (BAM); *The Parchman Hour* (The Guthrie Theater); *Ugly Lies the Bone* (Roundabout Theatre Company); *brownsville song...* (Lincoln Center); *Indomitable: James Brown* (The Apollo); *Holding It Down* (Metropolitan Museum); *A Raisin in the Sun, The Winter's Tale,*

Spunk (California Shakespeare Theater); *Adoration of the Old Woman* (INTAR); *Blood Dazzler* (Harlem Stage); *Four Electric Ghosts* (The Kitchen); and the world premiere of *Hurt Village* (Signature Theatre Company). For many years she has directed *The 24-Hour Plays* on Broadway. She served as director for HBO's emerging writer's showcase and tour consultant to Raphael Saadiq and J Cole. Additionally, she was a directing shadow on HBO's "Lovecraft Country." Patricia co-founded Angela's Pulse with her sister, choreographer, and organizer Paloma McGregor, and is Artist in Residence for Adam Driver's Arts in the Armed Forces and serves on the advisory board for the Parent Artist Advocacy League. She is a member of the National Theater's International Director's Lab and a Usual Suspect at New York Theater Workshop. McGregor attended the Yale School of Drama, where she was a Paul & Daisy Soros Fellow and Artistic Director of the Yale Cabaret.

CHARACTERS/CAST LIST



NGOZI ANYANWU
You



DANIEL J. WATTS
You No.2



XAVIER SCOTT EVANS
Person

BEHIND THE SCENES LOOK AT REHEARSAL

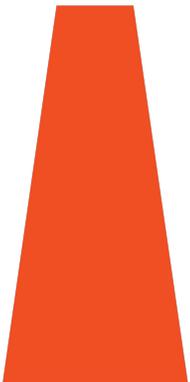


SECTION III: YOUR STUDENTS AS AUDIENCE

Theater Vocabulary

Vocabulary from *The Last of the Love Letters*

Free Verse



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.*

VOCABULARY from *The Last of the Love Letters*

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.

ABSOLVE: *To declare someone or something free from blame, guilt, or responsibility.*

AGAPE: *A Greco-Christian term referring to unconditional love, "the highest form of love, **charity**" and "the love of God for man and of man for God." C. S. Lewis uses "agape" in *The Four Loves* to describe what he believes is the highest level of love known to humanity: A selfless love that is passionately committed to the well-being of others.*

INCANTATION: *A series of words said as a magic spell or charm.*

PLACES: *The stage command for actors to take their positions at the opening of an act or scene.*

FREE VERSE

The Last of the Love Letters is written in mostly monologue form and in free verse.

From litcharts.com:

Free verse is the name given to poetry that doesn't use any strict meter or rhyme scheme. Because it has no set meter, poems written in free verse can have lines of any length, from a single word to much longer. William Carlos Williams's short poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" is written in free verse. It reads:

"so much depends / upon / a red wheel / barrow / glazed with rain / water / beside
the white / chickens."

SOME ADDITIONAL KEY DETAILS ABOUT FREE VERSE

The opposite of free verse is formal verse, or poetry that uses both a strict meter and rhyme scheme.

Not only do poets writing in free verse have the freedom to write unrhymed lines of any length, but they also often use enjambment in unconventional ways, inserting line breaks in the middle of sentences and even in the middle of words (such as "wheelbarrow" and "rainwater").

Walt Whitman is often said to be the father of free verse. It's true that he popularized this type of poetry, but in fact there were others who had written unrhymed, unmetred poetry before him.

Most poets writing today write in free verse.

FREE VERSE IN DEPTH

In order to understand free verse in more depth, it's helpful to have a strong grasp of a few other literary terms related to poetry:

POETRY: Also referred to as “verse,” poetry is a genre of literature that consists of writing that’s arranged into lines that often follow a pattern of rhythm, rhyme, or both. The three main types of poetry are:

FORMAL VERSE: Poetry with a strict meter (rhythmic pattern) and rhyme scheme.

BLANK VERSE: Poetry with a strict meter but no rhyme scheme.

FREE VERSE: Poetry without any strict meter or rhyme scheme.

STRESS: In poetry, the term stress refers to the emphasis placed on certain syllables in words. For instance, in the word “happily” the emphasis is on the first syllable (“hap”), so “hap” is the “stressed” syllable and the other two syllables (“pi” and “ly”) are “unstressed.”

FOOT: In poetry, a “foot” refers to the rhythmic units of stressed and unstressed syllables that make up lines of meter. For example, an iamb is one type of foot that consists of one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, as in the word “De-fine.”

METER: A pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that defines the rhythm of lines of poetry. Poetic meters are named for the type and number of feet they contain. For example, iambic pentameter is a type of meter that contains five iambs per line (thus the prefix “penta,” which means five).

FREE VERSE, METER, AND RHYME

Poems written in free verse are characterized by generally not using meter or rhyme, but that doesn’t mean that they can never include meter or rhyme. In fact, poets writing in free verse often do include a bit of meter or rhyme in their poetry. Saying that a poem is “free verse” just means that the use of meter or rhyme is not extensive or consistent in the poem.

For instance, TS Elliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is a famous free verse poem in which many lines end in rhyme, but those rhymes don’t follow any particular pattern (or rhyme scheme) and the poem follows no particular meter. Similarly, Walt Whitman was

known to occasionally lapse in and out of using meter in his unrhymed poetry—but for the most part his poems don't make use of meter, so they're still considered free verse.

STANZAS IN FREE VERSE

While some types of formal verse have specific requirements for the length or number of stanzas, free verse has no such restrictions. A poet writing in free verse may use stanzas of regular length consistently throughout their poem, though more often than not the length of stanzas in free verse poems varies at least somewhat throughout the poem—which is just to say that they don't follow any rule in particular.

FREE VERSE AND PROSE POEMS

Since free verse is, by definition, free of formal constraints, there aren't any specific types or “forms” of free verse poetry (as there are with formal verse)—except for one. Prose poems are a specific type of free verse poetry that doesn't have any line breaks, and which therefore take the form of paragraphs.

WHY DO WRITERS USE FREE VERSE?

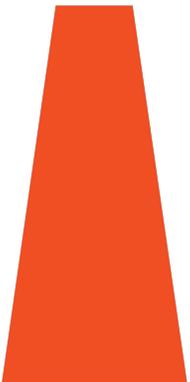
Generally speaking, formal verse gradually fell out of fashion with poets over the course of the 20th century. This was in part because, as literacy levels rose, meter and rhyme (which originated as formal features to aid in memorization and comprehension) no longer seemed necessary.

But free verse was also attractive to poets simply because it lacked the restrictions and constraints imposed on poetry by meter and rhyme, and therefore left it to the poet to determine the form his or her poem would take—and to invent his or her own restrictions and constraints. Today, it could be said that the main reason most poets write in free verse is simply that it has become the norm, in much the same way that formal and blank verse were once the norm.

While free verse lacks some of the restraints of formal and blank verse, it still involves all the elements that make up the form of a poem (including diction, syntax, lineation, stanza, rhythm, and the many different types of rhyme). It's just that there aren't any rules governing how they must be used.

SECTION IV: YOUR STUDENTS AS ACTORS

Reading a Scene for Understanding
The Atlantic Technique Exercise
Scene Analysis Worksheet



READING A SCENE FOR UNDERSTANDING

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

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

STUDENT GOAL

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

MATERIALS

Pens, pencils, copies of the following scene from the play, and copies of the Literal, Want, Action, As-If worksheet and/or Mini-Lesson.

THE ATLANTIC TECHNIQUE EXERCISE

STEP ONE

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

STEP TWO

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

STEP THREE

Ask the students to read the Introduction to the Practical Aesthetic Introduction sheet and have the students answer the four questions on the Scene Analysis Worksheet .

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

STEP FOUR

After the students have completed the question worksheet, ask each actor to read the scene in front of the classroom for an audience. Students should incorporate the ideas from the worksheet as they read the scene.

MONOLOGUE

from *The Last Of The Love Letters*

YOU #1

I hope you understand

I had to

I had to choose myself

I had to

I had to save myself

It was you or me

I chose me

For once

I chose me

Me

And that

That

This

This

This is the story I had to make to in order to make this okay for me to leave This is the story
I tell myself over and over

And if I tell it enough times

It'll be true

This is the story I tell myself

True stories are too painful

The truth is too painful

Cause the truth is that

The truth is that it wasn't all bad THE TRUTH....

We did the best we could

We tried

You tried

I tried

You

You

You were very best thing

Okay I'm really going this time

THE ATLANTIC TECHNIQUE 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.

***NOTE:** in this case, the actor will decide to whom the monologue is being addressed*

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

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

EXAMPLES:

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

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

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

EXAMPLE: *Get a favor. It's AS-IF I forgot to do my science homework and I'm asking my*

teacher for an extra day to hand it in.

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

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

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

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

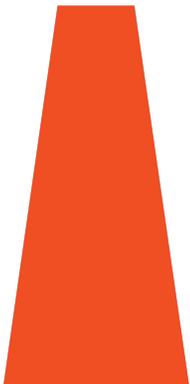
SCENE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Here are your “tools” for understanding your character:

	SAMPLE
WHAT IS MY CHARACTER LITERALLY DOING?	<i>YOU #1 is literally talking to YOU #2 about what she felt she had to do in order to make leaving the relationship feel okay.</i>
WHAT DOES MY CHARACTER WANT?	<i>YOU #1 wants YOU #2 to give her one compelling reason why they should stay together.</i>
WHAT IS THE ACTION I'M GOING TO PLAY?	<i>To get someone to come through for me.</i>
THE AS-IF...	

SECTION V | YOUR STUDENTS AS ARTISTS

Post Theater Creative Response Activity
Common Core & DOE Theater Blueprint



POST THEATER CREATIVE RESPONSE ACTIVITY

Developing a Personal Creative Response

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To develop critical thinking skills through examining a theme in *The Last of the Love Letters* and relating that theme to an individual creative response.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand that an important theme from *The Last of the Love Letters* portrays the truths and messages of the play.

MATERIALS

Pencils, pens, writing paper OR word processing software.

STEP ONE

Discuss the impact that isolation plays on the characters in *The Last of the Love Letters*.

STEP TWO

Ask the students to write a monologue or a free verse a poem in reflection of the theme “isolation.”

STEP THREE

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

COMMON CORE & DOE THEATER BLUEPRINT

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

Theater conveys the significance individuals place on their life choices. For example:

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

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Do the direction and staging reinforce the theme of "isolation" which is of significance in *The Last of the Love Letters*?

Do you accept the concept put forward in *The Last of the Love Letters* that a person's self-worth can be affected by their relationships with others?

STRAND BENCHMARKS

THEATER MAKING: ACTING

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

THEATER MAKING: PLAYWRITING/PLAY MAKING

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

DEVELOPING THEATER LITERACY

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

MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH THEATER

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

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

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

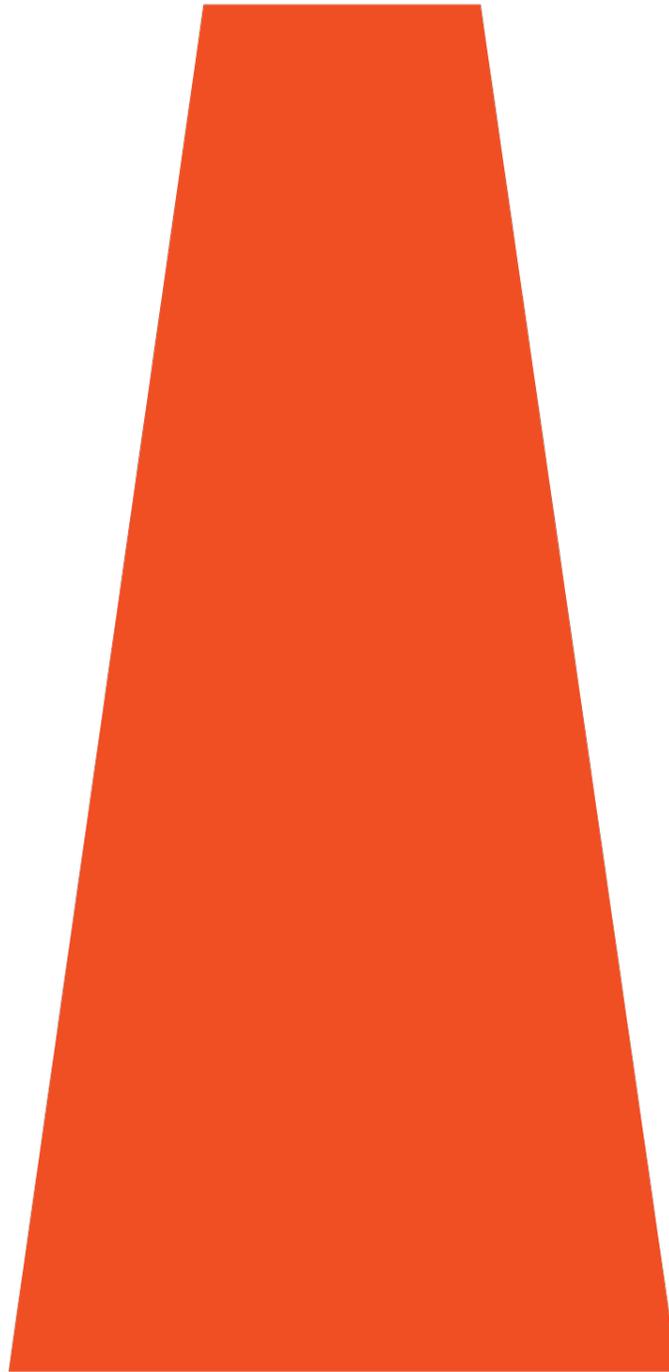
SECTION VI | THE ATLANTIC LEGACY

Atlantic Theater Company & Atlantic Acting School

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

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

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



LINDA GROSS THEATER | 336 W 20th St. New York, NY, 10011 | **ATLANTIC STAGE 2** | 330 W 16th St. New York, NY, 10011 | **OFFICES/SCHOOL** | 76 Ninth Ave., New York, NY 10011 | **ATLANTICTHEATER.ORG**