

INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



OKLAHOMA!

OKLAHOMA! SYNOPSIS

CURLY: "They gonna make a state out of this territory, they gonna put it in the Union. Country's a'changin'; gotta change with it."

—*Oklahoma!*

The setting is Indian Territory, now the state of Oklahoma; the time is the beginning of the 20th century. Curly enters to see Aunt Eller churning butter, but he has come to ask Laurey, Aunt Eller's niece, to a box social that evening. Laurey feigns indifference to Curly, but she is actually in love with him. To arouse his jealousy, she decides to go to the box social with the hired hand, Jud Fry, who is secretly in love with her. Meanwhile, Ado Annie, Laurey's friend, reveals that her date for the social will be the Persian peddler Ali Hakim.

Curly and Laurey decide to go to the social together, so Curly visits Jud at his dismal room in the smokehouse to tell Jud that Laurey won't be his date. Having delivered his message, Curly departs, leaving an angry Jud behind.

The box social opens the second act and is a boisterous affair. Farmers and cowmen sing of their mutual rivalry with good humor. A spirited contest ensues for Laurey's box between Jud and Curly. Determined to be the winner, Curly sells everything he owns and wins the box for the exorbitant sum of \$42.31. Three weeks later, Curly and Laurey are married, but the drunken Jud breaks into the festivities and threatens Curly with a knife. The party is spoiled, but a makeshift trial clears Curly of any wrongdoing, and sends the couple off on their honeymoon.

Oklahoma! opened new vistas for the American musical with its innovative approach and with the vitality and inspiration of Oscar Hammerstein's text and lyrics and Richard Rodgers' music. It created box office history, running on Broadway for five years and nine months, and touring the U.S.



DENVER CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
Theatre Company

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OKLAHOMA!

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OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II

BASED ON THE PLAY

"GREEN GROW THE LILACS" BY **LYNN RIGGS**

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RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN

“It is a modern tragedy that despair has so many spokesmen, and hope so few.”

—Oscar Hammerstein

Richard Rodgers was born in New York City in 1902 and collaborated with Lorenz Hart when both attended Columbia University. After working together for several years, they wrote a revue called *Garrick Gaieties* (1925) as a fundraiser for the Theatre Guild, which featured the hit song “Manhattan”, kicking off a string of successful musicals and films. They quickly became among the most popular songwriters in America. Over the next six years they wrote the scores for fifteen successful musical comedies for Broadway and five movie musicals, full of wit, charm and sophistication, including *Pal Joey*, *The Boys from Syracuse*, *By Jupiter* and *Jumbo*.

Oscar Hammerstein II was born in New York City in 1895 to a theatrical family; his father managed a vaudeville theatre; his uncle Arthur was a successful Broadway producer and his grandfather was an opera impresario. Oscar attended law school but, bored, soon dropped out and started working for his uncle as a stage manager, and began to write scripts and songs on the side. Oscar’s first play, *The Light*, lasted four performances. Undaunted, he began working on lyrics and librettos with Otto Harbach and others. The resulting operettas were

very successful, including *Rose Marie* (music by Rudolf Friml), *The Desert Song* (music by Sigmund Romberg), *The New Moon* (Romberg) and the ground-breaking *Showboat* (with Jerome Kern).

As Hammerstein was redefining the terms of operetta, Rodgers and Hart were changing the accepted norms of musical comedy, raising the bar for wit, sophistication and urbanity. Hart, at five feet tall, was a lonely and unattractive man who became progressively overtaken by alcoholism, and often Rodgers would have to lock him in a room with a piano to get him to write lyrics for their next show. Hart would usually finish a song lyric as fast as he could write the words on a napkin, while Oscar Hammerstein would often take days or weeks to write a single lyric.

Rodgers and Hammerstein together wrote an impressive string of Broadway musical classics, including *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *State Fair*, *Allegro*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *Me and Juliet*, *Pipe Dream*, *Cinderella*, *Flower Drum Song*, and their evergreen hit, *The Sound of Music*. Their work has won countless awards, been recorded on original cast albums, made into movies, made fortunes for many, generated books and articles, and making Broadway history.

<http://study.com/academy/lesson/Rodgers-and-Hammerstein-biography-musicals-lesson.html>

OKLAHOMA! THE MUSICAL

When the Theatre Guild decided to produce a musical version of Lynn Riggs’ play, *Green Grow the Lilacs*, about the early settlers of Oklahoma, Theresa “Terry” Helburn, founder and director of the Guild, asked Richard Rodgers to see the Guild’s Westport County Playhouse production, which ran for only about 70 performances. Though the play had not been a success, Rodgers immediately saw the potential for turning the play into a musical, but his longtime partner Lorenz Hart, the man who wrote the lyric “way out West on West End Avenue”, wasn’t interested, finding the subject too country for his urban tastes. Rodgers and Hart had previously written the music and lyrics for 26 Broadway musicals during a more than 20-year collaboration. Their “big four” were *Babes in Arms*, *The Boys from Syracuse*, *Pal Joey* and *On Your Toes*.

Rodgers was firmly committed to the “Lilacs” project, so, with Hart’s blessing, he pursued Oscar Hammerstein, who had in recent years suffered a string of flops. Hammerstein was reluctant to take Hart’s place, but Rodgers was persistent. He knew he wanted Hammerstein, the man who had penned the lyrics to *Showboat*, which Rodgers very much admired. Rodgers and Hammerstein joined

forces, and the whole course of musical theatre was changed. The collaboration also changed the way that Rodgers worked as a composer. With Hart, who needed to a tune to get himself going, Rodgers had always written the music first; now, Hammerstein would write the lyrics first, which Rodgers would then set to music. Hammerstein, a perfectionist, took three weeks to write the lyrics to “O What a Beautiful Mornin’”! Hammerstein was also very much a romantic, while Hart had been more of a brittle, cynical sophisticate.

When *Oklahoma!* debuted in 1943, the country was coming out of the Great Depression and was in the dark and exhausting grip of World War II. Ticket sales on Broadway were slumping and audiences were looking for uplifting entertainment. The Theatre Guild was deep in the red and desperately needed a hit. *Oklahoma!*, which was first titled *Away We Go*, then simply *Oklahoma*, then famously *Oklahoma!* with an exclamation point, was a far cry from the usual Broadway musical fare. *Oklahoma!* had a serious story, lyrics that moved the plot forward, psychological story ballets and cowboy choreography, and operetta-style music and plot.

Theresa Helburn had a real struggle raising the \$80

thousand needed to mount the show, and some very prominent producers turned her down flat. To help raise the money, Rodgers and Hammerstein were forced to take to the “penthouse circuit,” where, in the early days, Rodgers would play the piano and Hammerstein would sing the lyrics. After Alfred Drake and Joan Roberts were cast as the leads, Hammerstein was mercifully relieved of this task.

Rodgers remembered one night going to an Upper Westside apartment that “was not only large enough to have a ballroom in it, it actually *had* a ballroom in it.” But while seventy people listened politely, nibbled canapés, and sipped champagne, they subscribed not one dime. Finally, though, Helburn managed to scrape up the backing she needed to get the show open. The original production was directed by Rouben Mamoulian, and choreographed by the innovative and demanding dynamo Agnes DeMille, a former ballet dancer, and the niece of Hollywood producer Cecil B. De Mille.

Writing about opening night of the show on Broadway, Walter Winchell, a highly influential gossip columnist, said in his review that the show had “no legs, no jokes, no chance”. Most musicals of the era opened with a line of scantily clad chorus girls, whereas the chorus in *Oklahoma!* doesn’t arrive until forty minutes into the first act. Winchell of course was forced to eat his words when lines formed around the block for the box office of the St. James Theatre to buy tickets for the musical play.

Oklahoma!, with its innovative style, established forever the importance of Rodgers and Hammerstein as a leading creative team in musical theatre. Hammerstein let the dramatic situation, not Broadway musical conventions, dictate what happened onstage.

And then it did another thing which was that it used dance—and particularly Agnes de Mille’s ballet—as a way of propelling the story forward, of exploring and explaining the characters innermost

thoughts and feelings and fears. And it wrapped this all up in one package that just felt completely unlike anything that had ever appeared on Broadway before. It was received in 1943 the way *Hamilton* is received today, as something really radically new in the theater.

Hammerstein once said that if you get a musical off on the right foot, you can read to the audience from the Manhattan phone book for the next forty-five minutes and still not lose them. But if you get off on the wrong foot, it’s uphill work for the rest of the show. Perhaps that is why he spent three full weeks writing the words to “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’!” His inspiration was Lynn Riggs’s stage directions for *Green Grow the Lilacs*, which Hammerstein liked so much he thought it a pity the audience didn’t get to hear them. The song, of course, became world famous virtually overnight, and it is impossible for us today to comprehend how fresh and captivating it must have sounded to that first-night audience of fifty years ago.

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<http://www.nih.com/bio/Hammerstein/2011-Oscar>

<http://www.nih.com/bio/175/Rodgers-Richard>

A lot of fun trivia facts about both the musical and movie of *Oklahoma!* can be found here: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0048445/trivia>

“OKLAHOMA!” THE SONG

In April 1953 Oklahoma State Rep. George Nigh of McAlester introduced a bill to replace Oklahoma’s official song, “Oklahoma, A Toast,” with the title song of the musical. Legislator Boyd Cowden favored “Oklahoma!” because he believed that the song and the Broadway show had done much to erase the negative image created by Steinbeck’s

1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. The measure passed, Gov. Johnston Murray signed it, and it became effective on September 5, 1953. A general consensus remains that the musical has done more to improve the state’s public image than any other effort ever made.

OKLAHOMA! THE MOVIE

In 1955 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer put *Oklahoma!* on the screen. The Hollywood adaptation was generally faithful to both of the earlier versions. However, producer Arthur Hornblow, noting that “Oklahoma just doesn’t look like the Oklahoma of 1907 anymore,” filmed the outdoor segments near Nogales, Arizona. The movie starred Gordon MacRae as Curly, Shirley Jones as Laurey, Rod Steiger as Jud, Gloria Grahame as Ado Annie, Gene

Nelson as Will Parker, and Charlotte Greenwood as Aunt Eller. Oklahoma-born Barbara Lawrence played Gertie Cummings. The world premiere, held in New York, included a parade of actual surreys led by Oklahoma Gov. Raymond Gary. In 1956 the film won Academy Awards for best musical score and best sound recording and was nominated for film editing and cinematography.

LYNN RIGGS, AUTHOR OF *GREEN GROW THE LILACS*

“So *Green Grow The Lilacs*, the play that *Oklahoma!* was adapted from, was written in France by a 29-year-old gay cowboy turned poet and playwright who was from Oklahoma.”

—Terry Gross, NPR, in an interview with Todd Purdum, author of *Something Wonderful*.

Rollie Lynn Riggs was an American author, poet, playwright and screenwriter born in 1899 in the Verdigris Valley south of Claremore, Oklahoma in Indian Territory. His father was a cowboy who later became a bank president in Claremore. His mother was part Cherokee, and she secured his Cherokee allotment for him, which he mortgaged to help to support his early writing efforts. Riggs’s father was distant and cold, Riggs’s stepmother unkind, so he moved in with his Aunt Mary, a warm affectionate woman who became the model for Aunt Eller in *Green Grow the Lilacs*.

He was educated at the Eastern University Preparatory School in Claremore, Oklahoma, studied for three years at the University of Oklahoma, and then moved to New York, after a brief stopover in Chicago. In New York he wrote for the *Wall Street Journal*, sold books at Macy’s and swept out Wall Street offices. With little early success writing for theatre, Riggs returned to Oklahoma in 1919, writing for the *Oil and Gas Journal*.

Moving next to Los Angeles, Riggs worked as an extra in the theatre, and a copy editor at the *Los Angeles Times*, which published his first poem. Returning home, Riggs entered the University of Oklahoma in 1920, and taught English there from 1922–1923, but contracted tuberculosis during his senior year and did not graduate. He moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, to improve his health and soon joined a community of artists there. He wrote plays there, acted, and had at least one of his short plays, *Knives from Syria*, produced there by an amateur acting company.

Wanting more opportunities in theatre than Santa Fe was able to offer, in 1926 he moved back to New York. His first play to have a New York production, *The Big Lake*, won him a Guggenheim Fellowship. He used the fellowship money to travel to France, where he began writing *Green Grow the Lilacs* in the Paris café Les Deux Magots, then finally completing the play five months later in the South of France.

He then lived in Santa Fe, Los Angeles, and New York, and worked as a screenwriter for Paramount and Universal Studios in Los Angeles, where he wrote the screenplay for a number of movies, including *The Garden of Allah*, *The Plainsman*, *Stingaree*, *Sherlock Holmes in Washington* and *Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror*.

Riggs was gay, and often was chosen to escort Hollywood actresses including Bette Davis and Joan Crawford on social occasions when they had no available husbands or boyfriends to escort them. He escorted Ms. Davis so often that one gossip columnist claimed that the pair were “ablaze”, which deeply embarrassed Riggs.

Little is known of Riggs’s private life or possible relationships, however there are thought to be hints of his sexual orientation in the character of Jeeter (later Jud) in Riggs’s *Green Grow the Lilacs*.

Of *Green Grow the Lilacs*, Oscar Hammerstein noted, “Mr. Riggs’ play is the wellspring of almost all that is good in *Oklahoma!* I kept many of the lines of the original play without making any changes in them at all for the simple reason that they could not be improved on . . . Lynn Riggs and *Green Grow the Lilacs* are the very soul of *Oklahoma!*”

Sources for this article include Phyllis Cole Braunlich’s *Haunted by Home: the life and letters of Lynn Riggs* (Univ. of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1988); Tim Carter’s *Oklahoma!: the making of an American musical* (Yale Univ. Press: New Haven, 2007); Max Wilk’s *OK! : the story of “Oklahoma!”* (Applause: New York, 2002); and the clippings files of the Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

To read more about Lynn Riggs, go to <http://thislandpress.com/2014/04/30/broadways-forgotten-man/>, to read an in-depth article on Riggs by Charles Morrow

OKLAHOMA STATE HISTORY

“The history of Oklahoma is a history of movement, possession and dispossession. It is American history told in fast forward.”

—David A. Chang

Oklahoma is situated between the Great Plains and the Ozark Plateau in the Gulf of Mexico watershed. The western part of the state is subject to drought and high winds; the eastern part is humid and sub-tropical. The Dry Line, an imaginary line that separates moist air from an eastern body of water and dry desert air from the west, bisects the state. It was an important factor in pre-historic settlement.

Agrarian tribes settled in the eastern part of the state while hunter-gatherer tribes settled in the western part. Humans have lived in the region of Oklahoma as long as the oldest known documented Paleo-Indian cultures, according to anthropologists. The development of Oklahoma's vast resources began with the Native Americans who developed their own nations, languages and territories. The Kiowa-Apache culture were chiefly hunter-gatherers who migrated from Canada to the Southwest about the time Francisco Coronado explored the Southwest and introduced the horse. The Caldoan-Mississippi tribes emerged from the woodland groups. Their villages became known as tribal centers because of the elite residences and platform mound constructions. The Wichita Plains culture occupied the eastern Great Plains. They grew corn, beans, squash, marsh elder and tobacco. They also hunted deer, bison and collected mussels in the rivers. The Kiowa-Apache moved in next. Though they had similar lifestyles to the Wichitas, they remained apart from them. The Kiowas had a well-structured tribal government with warrior and religious societies. After the Spanish came, the Apaches, appropriating Spanish ponies, improved their mobility, in part to raid settlements, travelled faster and farther, waging skirmishes against other tribes.

Oklahoma remained relatively free of Spanish and French influence until 1803, the year of the Louisiana Purchase. Oklahoma was part of the territory Napoleon sold to the United States. In the Adams-Onis treaty with Spain in 1819, the Oklahoma Panhandle was separated from the rest of the future state and ceded to the Spanish government.

In 1830 Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. This act gave President Andrew Jackson power to negotiate treaties with the Native Americans. The tribes were to give up their eastern lands for land in the west. Those who wished to stay were to assimilate and become citizens of their state. The “Five Civilized Tribes”, the Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, Cherokee and Seminole, were forced to move west in the so-called, infamous, “Trail of Tears.” While Andrew Jackson hoped and believed the Native Americans would become extinct, the tribes managed to survive the move despite lack of food,

poor weather and white harassment. Many of these people settled in Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma.

In treaties with the Creeks and the Seminoles, tribes would sell some of their lands in Oklahoma to the United States to settle other Indian tribes and Black freedmen. These “Unassigned Lands” were opened up for settlement by President Benjamin Harrison. Oklahoma was known as the “Sooner” state because some settlers came before the land was opened and staked their claim early on. The land was settled rapidly and whites soon outnumbered Indians.

In 1893, the Dawes Commission was set up to negotiate agreements with the Five Civilized Tribes, for the allotment of tribal lands to individual Native Americans. But actually, the Commission was secretly pressured by US government elements to deprive the Indians of their land and resources.

In 1902, the leaders of Indian Territory sought to become their own state of Sequoyah. The US government denied their request. Finally, the Indian Territory worked with the Oklahoma Territory to become a state. On November 16, 1907, Oklahoma became the 46th state in the Union. After statehood, the economy prospered with agriculture, cattle ranching, cotton and particularly oil.

Oklahoma became prosperous in the 20th century. This prosperity is reflected in some of the state's grand architecture, such as the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa.

African-Americans settled in various parts of the Territories, in particular in the Greenwood area of Tulsa and established their own Wall Street.

The Great Depression of 1929-1938 bankrupted many financial institutions and businesses. In addition, the Dust Bowl of 1936 hit farmers the hardest; many people relocated to the cities or settled in small communities known as “Hooverilles” (named after the sitting president). Many migrated to California where they were known as “Okies”. This great exodus was documented by John Steinbeck in his novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck attempted to portray the complex plight of the Oklahoma migrants, but didn't discuss those Sooners who stayed behind.

After World War II, Oklahoma saw the rise of tribal sovereignty, the rapid growth of suburbs and the oil boom and bust of the 1980s.

1. Chang, p. 2

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OKLAHOMA'S BLACK TOWNS: COMMUNITIES OF FREEDOM

By Charleszine "Terry" Nelson
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For much of American history, land was a symbol of freedom and self-determination. It demonstrated the desire to live, work, and worship freely, despite racism and inequality. Black people organized towns and communities in all parts of the country, rural and urban, northern and southern, hidden away from all eyes or among interracial neighbors. These communities allowed black people and families to move toward the promise of freedom on the western frontier.

All of the Black towns in Oklahoma represented a unique chapter in American history. Nowhere else did so many African-American people come together to create, occupy and govern their own communities. From 1865 to 1920, African-Americans created more than 50 towns and settlements first in Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory, then in the state of Oklahoma. Some were short-lived and others still exist today.

The all-black towns prospered until the 1920s. They gradually declined under the pressure of segregation laws, the Great Depression, and the population flight from farm to city after WWII. Of the 50 original towns and the African-Americans pioneers who built them, 13 towns are still incorporated and survive today (and are highlighted on the map below).



Boley, founded in 1903, is the largest and most well-known of the more than 50 all-Black towns of Oklahoma; it is one of the 13 still in existence. Named after J.B. Boley, a railroad official of the Fort Smith and Western Railway, and it was incorporated in 1905.

By 1911, Boley boasted more than four thousand citizens and many business. It had three cotton gins, two banks, and two colleges: Creek-Seminole College and Methodist Episcopal College. Booker T. Washington proclaimed that Boley was "the most enterprising and in many ways the most interesting of Negro towns in the United States".

Brooksville, also founded in 1903, was originally named Sewell. The name was changed in 1912 to honor A. R. Brooks, a cotton buyer and farmer, the first African American in the area. His son, W.M. Brooks, was the first postmaster in Brooksville. In 1906, Rev. Jedson White organized St. John's Baptist Church. The town also had a Santa Fe Railroad stop, two doctors, a school and two mills.

The declining cotton market and the Great Depression made life difficult in Brooksville, as in many Oklahoma communities. By October 1972, most citizens of Brooksville departed, but the town survived.

Clearview was founded in 1903 along the tracks of the Fort Smith and Western Railroad. J. A. Roper, Lemuel Jackson, and John Grayson platted the town site and formed the Lincoln Town site Company which attracted settlers and advertised the settlement. The post office was designated in 1904. Grayson and Roper organized the Abe Lincoln Trading Company to operate a general store, deal in farm produce, and buy and sell real estate. Grayson became the town's first postmaster. The town also boasted a two-story hotel, a print shop, a brick school building and two churches. Again the Great Depression and the falling price of cotton severely crippled the town.

Grayson. Formerly known as Wildcat, this small rural community, established in 1902, had a post office, five general stores, two blacksmiths, two drug stores, a physician, and a cotton gin. It also had two public schools, two churches, and a community center where area residents voted.

Langston is one of the few remaining all-black towns located in the former Oklahoma Territory. Opened for settlement on October 22, 1890, the town was named for John Mercer Langston, the first black Virginian to serve in the United States House of Representatives.

Langston's principal founders were William L. Eagleson, a prominent newspaper editor, Edward P. McCabe, a former Kansas state auditor, and Charles W. Robbins, a white land speculator. The town's early businesses included grocery stores, saloons, blacksmith shops, barber shops, a feed store, banks, ice cream parlors, and a newspaper, the *Langston City Herald*, edited by McCabe. Langston's citizens also established several churches, Masonic orders, public and private elementary and secondary schools, a volunteer fire company, and a seventy-five member militia.

Townpeople successfully lobbied to have the Colored Agricultural and Normal University of Oklahoma (today Langston University) established in Langston in 1897. When small towns in Oklahoma collapsed as a result of economic depression, urbanization trends, and war time migration, this institution contributed to Langston's survival even in the absence of convenient access to railroad. Today, Langston is the largest of Oklahoma's historically black towns.

Lima. Seminoles and Seminole freedman occupied the area before Lima (named for the local limestone quarries) was incorporated in 1913. *The Lima Observer* was the town newspaper. Rosenwal Hall was built with community funds and is now on the National Register of Historic Places. The first postmaster was Grudge V. Gross and the post office survived until 1957.

Lima's Mont Zion Methodist Church was built in 1915. John L. Simpson, a Farmer's Union leader, spearheaded the integration of African Americans into Local Number One in 1925. In 1926 the Greater Seminole Oil Field brought prosperity and white settlers to the town.

Redbird originated with the settlement of the E.L. Barber family which founded the First Baptist Church in 1898. Redbird obtained a post office in 1902.

Rentiesville, founded in 1903, was named for William Rentie, a local landowner. William was the town's only lawman until 1908, when he was shot and killed by a man he had arrested for being drunk. The Civil War Battle of Honey Springs, Oklahoma's largest Civil War engagement, was fought about a half mile east of Rentiesville.

John Hope Franklin, (1915-2009) Professor Emeritus of Duke University, historian, and author of numerous books, including *From Slavery to Freedom*, was born in Rentiesville. His father B. C. Franklin served as the second postmaster of Rentiesville.

Summit, in Muskogee County, was originally called South Muskogee. Part of the Land Run of 1889, Summit was established in 1910.

Taft, founded in 1902, was initially named after William H. Twine, an editor of the *Muskogee Cimeter* newspaper. The citizens changed the name to Taft to honor the then Secretary of War (later President) William Howard Taft. The settlement was built in Creek Nation on land allotted to Creek freedmen. The Reaves Realty Company advertised Taft as the "Fastest growing Colored community in Oklahoma."

It had two newspapers, the *Enterprise* and the *Tribune*. The first mayor, Charlie Ford, owned Ford's Cotton Gin, and W.R. Grimmett operated a sawmill. Before 1910 the community supported three general stores, one drugstore, a brickyard, a soda pop factory, a livery stable, a gristmill, a lumberyard, two hotels, a restaurant, a bank, and a funeral home. Taft's City Hall is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Reeder Walker House and St. Paul Baptist Church are listed in the Oklahoma Landmarks inventory. In 1973 the town elected Lelia Foley-Davis as mayor, the first nation's female African American Mayor.

Tatums was established in Indian Territory in 1895. Henry Taylor owned the community's largest home and offered it to travelers for overnight accommodations. Lee Tatum was the town's first postmaster, before being appointed U.S. Marshal. Tatums' residents soon established a church and school. A hotel was built in 1899, a blacksmith shop in 1900, a cotton gin and sawmill in 1910 and a motor garage in 1918. When oil wells were drilled in the 1920s, it brought wealth to the farmers and landowners. The Julius Rosenwald Fund helped build a brick school in 1925-26.

Tulahassee is considered the oldest of the surviving All-Black Towns of Indian Territory. Its roots began in 1850 when the Creek Nation built a school along the wagon wheel ruts of the Texas Road. The council transferred the American Indian students to another school and gave Tullahassee to the freedmen on October 24, 1881. The town was incorporated in 1902 and platted in 1907. In 1916 the African Methodist Episcopal Church established Flipper Davis College. The college, which occupied the old Tullahassee Mission, was the only private institution for African Americans in the state.

Vernon, founded in 1911, was named for Bishop W. T. Vernon of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The Fort Smith and Western Railway operated through the town, and it served major coal mining operations in eastern Oklahoma at Coal Creek, Bokoshe and McCurtain. A major portion of the freight traffic was metallurgical-grade coal from San Bois Coal Company mines near McCurtain.

A post office was established in 1920, in what was a grocery and dry good store. The building, known as The Rock Front, later became a tavern and pool hall and cemetery. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

DEARFIELD, COLORADO

Dearfield 1910

“Dearfield, a testament to the challenges and successes of Black Americans in the early 1900s, is symbolic of the African American pioneer spirit. The 160 acre town site was to become the first black homesteading settlement in Colorado. Dearfield’s historic significance represents the national Black American colonization movement that resulted in their many contributions to the settlement of the West. On a state level of historic significance, the 1910 Dearfield settlement effort was the only remaining Black American Colony established for the purpose of promoting self-sufficiency and land ownership in the state. It also exemplified the impact of the Enlarged, or Dryland Homestead Act of 1909 in town development in Colorado.

“Its history begins at the turn of the century with Oliver Toussaint Jackson and his dream to create a place where blacks could become self-sufficient. His belief was that, given the persistent discrimination and prejudice against black people in the first decade of the 20th Century, Black Americans would have to found their own communities and establishments. This was the only way to insure that a living could be made without resorting to the tenant/servant status of the past. Jackson worked for Governor Shafroth and was a significant leader in Colorado during the first four decades of the 20th century. Jackson had been looking for a location since 1906 and the Governor helped him secure a parcel of homesteading land that had just opened up to claim in Weld County. In 1910 Jackson filed on the 320 acres and promoted the area to other Blacks

for homesteading as well as business. Many Black Americans left their jobs in the cities to experience the personal freedom of land ownership and self-determination which was a national movement of the time.”

—Statement of significance in the National Register of Historic Places

Dearfield land was valued at \$750,000 and grew from a community of 8 families in 1910, to over 700 people by 1921. It had a school, two churches, a blacksmith shop, dance-hall, restaurant, grocery store, boarding house, and gas station. The residents learned the techniques of dry land farming, a way to grow crops in regions of limited rainfall and moisture. They grew a host of crops such as corn, alfalfa, beets, and strawberries, and raised hogs, chickens and turkeys. The demands for food stuffs and other supplies during WWII raised prices and secured a consistent market for goods. This pushed the farmers beyond their subsistence farming and into the world market. Unfortunately, the crash in 1918 backlashed on them, followed by the depression of the 1920s, and drought that lasted into the 1930s. By 1940 the population of Dearfield had diminished but Jackson stayed until his death in 1948.

Dearfield sits approximately 25 miles east of Greeley, Colorado. The surrounding area is gently rolling hills of grassy prairie. The South Platte River is one mile north of Dearfield. Today, a few structures remain standing and six features can be found.

By Charleszine “Terry” Nelson
Senior Special Collection and Community Resource Manager
Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library

BLACK COWBOYS

Black people played a multiplicity of roles in the development of the American Frontier. They were ranch hands, cooks, guides, and trail bosses of cattle herds taken to market or other ranches. It is estimated that one in every four men who participated in the western cattle industry from 1866-1895 were African-American cowboys.

The Civil War took its toll on the economy. In order to regain economic stability it was necessary to find a reservoir of highly skilled cattle crews to move hundreds of head of wild and dangerous cattle across America. The impression that blacks were not involved in the western cattle industry—especially the cattle drives after the Civil War until just before the turn of the century—is mistaken. Although a hidden part of U.S. history, blacks were very involved.

The life of the Black trail riders was challenging, to say the least. They lived on the trail rolling up a pile of blankets, called a bedroll, and tying it to the saddle of the horse they were riding on the trail.

Each evening, the cowboys would lay out their bedroll around the campfire where they would sleep at night, taking turns watching over the cattle in shifts throughout the evening. Their diet consisted of beans, bacon, coffee and meat from cattle from the herd that had to be killed due to injuries. The trail riders were threatened by stampedes, floods, raids by the native populations, attacks, and attempts of theft and burglary by outlaws and hostile settlers.

In addition to getting the cattle to market, the duties of the Black cowboys also included escorting wagon trails west, guarding survey parties going into uncharted territories, or scouting for water and grass for the cattlemen. Many Black cowboys were also found doing jobs like cooks, wranglers, and “Mustangers” (the men who captured and broke wild horses). During rodeo season, they were also known to perform feats of horsemanship and calf-roping.

Racial prejudice was practiced openly against the Black cowboys, in addition to the other dangers of the trail. The worst indignities were often inflicted

by the hands of the trail bosses. It was common practice during slavery to reference blacks by first names only. Even after the war, they were referred to by their first name, instead of being referenced as mister or missus. Further, many of the U.S. Black military units were referred to as wild animals.

Once the Civil War ended, the demand for experienced cattle crews far exceeded the supply. Historians have placed the number of working cowboys at more than 35,000, around 8,000 of which were Black. Since many of the trained slaves,

now free blacks, had experience working with cattle on ranches, plantations and in the cavalry, they were hired on as cowboys. These unsung heroes were hardworking, law-abiding citizens. They were bold, daring and strong and only a small number of them were lawless.

By Charleszine "Terry" Nelson
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JUMPING THE BROOM

"Jumping the Broom" was originally a marriage ritual performed by a couple who (for whatever reason) could not manage a formal church wedding. The act of bride and groom literally jumping over a broom laid on the ground signified a commitment to one another akin to a formal marriage, in their own eyes and those of their community. The phrase and the custom seem to have originated in the British Isles in centuries past, where it was referred to as a "broomstick marriage", often implying a marriage of necessity, and reportedly practiced widely by Celts, Romani, and rural Anglo-Saxons. African-American

slaves, who were forbidden church weddings by their owners, seem to have adopted the custom and term from British Isles immigrants. The ritual mainly fell out of favor once African-Americans were able to marry in church. The custom came back into popularity with the African-American community with the television production of Alex Haley's novel *Roots*, which showed Kunte Kinte and his bride Bell jumping the broomstick. Today, many African-American couples include jumping the broom as a ritual following their formal vows, in part as a tribute to their enslaved forbears.

NON-TRADITIONAL CASTING OF AMERICAN MUSICALS

Probably the most famous example of non-traditional casting of a great American musical was in the late 1960s when Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway took over the leads in *Hello Dolly!* Broadway producer legend David Merrick was at the helm of what was already a long-running hit,

but when ticket sales began to flag, Merrick hit on the idea of replacing the all-White cast, with a line-up of star African American performers, including the two electrifying leads, both whom had had extensive stage and music careers. This version had a successful three-year Broadway run.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Pre-Performance Questions

1. Have you seen or read the play *Oklahoma!*? What are your expectations of the DCPA-Theatre Company production?
2. What does the term “American Dream” mean to you? Is it possible to achieve? Why or why not is the American Dream possible to achieve?
3. Does the American Dream change from cultural/ethnic group to cultural/ethnic group? If they have, how have cultural expectations changed over time?

Post-Performance Questions

1. How do the technical elements of scenic design, costumes and lighting enhance the story?
2. How did the production challenge your assumptions about the musical?
3. In what ways did the directorial choice of using an all African-American cast make you think about the musical in a new way?
4. In what ways does this production illuminate an otherwise little-known side of Oklahoma’s history and the expansion of the Oklahoma Territory?
5. What are the similarities and differences between “cowmen” and “farmers?” What in the musical supports these ideas?
6. How are women represented and treated in the musical? Does this representation/treatment serve to enhance or obscure the musical’s representation/treatment of men?
7. How does this musical comment on the future? How does the musical comment on the past? Is the comment one of celebration and/or warning?
8. What is the purpose of the “Dream Ballet” sequence? How does the scene progress the plot? In what ways does it impact your experience of the characters and story?
9. How does the Box Social fit into the plot? How is courtship portrayed in this scene? Is there a modern equivalent to a Box Social? If so, what is it and what are the similarities and differences?
10. How would you describe the relationship between Curly and Laurey? How does the relationship develop and what obstacles are in their way?
11. What is at issue between Curly and Jud Fry? What does Jud Fry represent? How do Jud’s life choices influence the plot?
12. How would you describe the relationships between Ali Hakim, Ado Annie, and Will?
13. How would you describe the way justice is meted out in *Oklahoma!*? In what ways was the trial (un)fair?

ACTIVITIES

The Dating Game

1. Divide the class into smaller groups. Each group will focus on one character from the play *Oklahoma!* and will create both a dating profile of the character and a list of potential questions for their suitors.
2. To create the dating profile, start with information that you know about the character from the text or from the performance. This would include how the character describes him/herself or what others characters say about him/her. List some of the character's mannerisms and characteristics. Create some fictional facts about the character to fill in some of the blanks about likes and dislikes.
3. To create the questions for suitors, consider what information would they like to gather about the suitor; what questions could be asked that are designed to explore, compare, contrast what the suitor may have in common with them; etc. The group should finalize three questions.
4. Once the profiles and questions have been created, have each group identify what other group is their "suitor." For example the group that selected Curly will choose the group that selected Laurey. Each group presents by asking questions of their suitor. Students within the suitor group answer the question based on information from the musical or their own imagining.
5. Discuss what questions and answers surprised them and which questions and answers they agree or disagree. Did any questions or answers ignite further interest in the historical period of the musical?

Writing PG: Articulate the position of self and others using experiential and material logic.

Drama and Theatre Arts PG: Employ drama and theatre skills, and articulate the aesthetics of a variety of characters and roles.

Historic Timeline

1. Ask students to research significant events in Oklahoma, the United States and the world leading up to, during and following the play *Oklahoma!* and to place them in chronological order.
2. Create a timeline using the information gathered.
3. Discussion Questions: What changes or innovations were happening during these times? How was the world changing? How are these historical events included in the play? What impact of these events still resonate today?

History PG: Develop an understanding of how people view, construct, and interpret history.

History PG: Analyze key historical periods and patterns of change over time within and across nations and cultures.

ACTIVITIES

Perspective Writing | Monologue: Personal Narratives for Characters

1. Select an important moment from the musical. This should be a moment that has more than one person in attendance. For example, the box social.
2. From this moment, the students are to pick a character from the story and to give the character's perspective and attitude of what transpired. Explanations of how they felt about this moment and what affects them should be explored.
3. Each student will write a short monologue describing the moment from the character's perspective of what they experienced.
4. Compare the monologues about the event from other characters that were involved. Discuss the similarities and differences that arose during the writing process. Was there general agreement of what happened or marked differences? Why were the moments similar or different? Were the variations subtle or obvious? Did the class agree on what was important to include and why? If not how would the elimination of some elements change the way the story would be understood when read?

Writing PG: Articulate the position of self and others using experiential and material logic.
Writing PG: Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.

Perspective Writing—Adapting Cultural Ideals to a Known Story

1. Start by brainstorming several titles of books, plays, and/or movies. Select a known story that is in one place and one time.
2. Determine what the main themes are about the story and what is important to the telling of the story.
3. Change the cultural group that is in the focal point of the story.
4. Discuss what changes may or may not be necessary to adapt the story?
5. Discuss how it works or not? Explain your answer.

Writing PG: Articulate the position of self and others using experiential and material logic.
Writing PG: Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.

PERSPECTIVES

Make your experience unforgettable when you join us for one of these insightful, educational events:

Creative Team Perspective

Sep 7 | 6pm | The Jones

Get an exclusive insider's perspective before the show when you join us for a free, professionally-moderated discussion with the creative team.

Cast Perspectives

Sep 16 | 1:30pm

Join a fun and engaging discussion with the actors after the performance.

Perspectives: Higher Education Advisory Council

Sep 19 | 6:30pm

Participate in a topical discussion led by members of our academic community after the performance.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The Denver Public Library recommends: Read!

Breathless by Beverly Jenkins.

In the second installment of Jenkins' Old West trilogy we venture to Arizona where Rhine and Eddy have settled with their niece, Portia Carmicheal to run a fine hotel, one of the finest in Arizona Territory. Looking into starting up a "dude ranch" venture, they hire an old family friend Kent Randolph. Portia has plenty of suitors but none as intriguing as Kent, so while she fights her feelings she soon finds she cannot fight her heart. Full of laughter and romance much like *Oklahoma!*, this western romance will take you back to where the winds come right behind the rains!

Watch!

The Wiz Live!

Checkout this 2015 remake of *The Wiz* with Cirque du Soleil Theatrical, ease on down to the library for a copy! Weaving parts of the original Broadway play with nods to the film, *The Wiz Live!* stands on its own. Not to be outdone by earlier versions, this new production showcases the talent of Queen Latifah, Mary J. Blige, David Alan Grier, and Stephanie Mills, Dorothy in the original Broadway play, now cast as Auntie Em.

Listen!

Bone and sinew of the land: America's forgotten black pioneers and the struggle for equality by Anna-Lisa Cox.

Anna-Lisa Cox combines diligent historical research with rich personal narratives to correct the story of America's first settlers. Narrated by Elizabeth Wiley this compelling audiobook chronicles the trials and triumphs of black pioneers, going beyond normal settler strife to illuminate the struggle for freedom and equality which helped shape modern American race relations. Cox brings necessary recognition to the hidden pioneers of this long-forgotten frontier.

Download!

You know Billy the Kid and Buffalo Bill but have you heard the deeds of the most famous Black cowboys, such as Deadwood Dick and Bill Pickett?

— Nat Love, nicknamed Deadwood Dick, survived 14 bullet wounds and wrote his autobiography about his birth as a slave, heading west after the Civil War, and living in Denver as a Pullman porter.

— Isom Dart understood horses better than any other man, probably because whenever he was around people he ended up in trouble, whether it was losing a fistfight, being arrested for murder, or having to hide in a grave during a shootout after stealing cattle.

You can find photographs of these famous men in our photo archives of the Western History department. Visit digital.denverlibrary.org to find these and more!



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