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INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



CHOIR BOY

INSIDE OUT

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Choir Boy

By **Tarell Alvin McCraney**

Directed by **Jamil Jude**

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THE PLAYWRIGHT ON THE PLAY

Tarell Alvin McCraney on *Choir Boy*:

“... the relevant question in *Choir Boy* is, how do you want your community to thrive? You want the best for your community but also to find out who you are as an individual? Can those two things live together and next to each other? We as black people wrestle with this because society tells us to leave behind our community and strive for something else outside of that. We watch Pharus, who is in love with his school and wants to be a part of the legacy, and at the same time, he identifies as queer, and he tries to make sure he still has a space in that community.”

In an interview for *Variety* magazine, Executive Editor for Film & Media, Brent Lang asked McCraney:

How much of this play is drawn from your own experiences?

So many moments. When I was that age, I was growing up black and queer in the South, and looking to be part of a community. I always felt like I had to negotiate who I was in order to do that. I still remember going to high school and how terrifying it was to try to be open and myself and excel in all the ways that I wanted to excel.

In [urban centers], we sort of think of homophobia as something that's dying out. That prejudices exist, but that the world is spinning forward. What do you think?

I don't know. The rates of black and latino LGBT homelessness is going up. It's not decreasing. You still have cyber bullying and other cruel things which LGBT students are subjected to. With Pharus, he's in a single-parent household. He's not a legacy student. He doesn't have any type of privilege you can use as a shield. I'm not sure we should be patting ourselves on the back when it's freezing cold and there are LGBT students out there on the streets without a home.

In *Choir Boy*, there's a moment where a white teacher lashes out at one of his black pupils for using the "N word." He essentially says that the slur is so hateful that no one, not even black people, should ever use it. Do you share that view?

No, I have a different view. I don't think a white man should tell a black child how to use that word. We as black people don't need the accreditation of white people to make us more worthy. In education, it's often the case where white people are telling us you're smart so therefore you are deemed smart. I want to challenge that.

McCraney shared his further thoughts on the trope of educators and students to National Public Radio's theatre reporter, Michel Martin:

What more often than not happens for young people at this point in their life, or at this turning point, is that people represent what society holds up. The headmaster is infinitely trying to protect the legacy of the school for the future generations, as he's been mandated to do. But in that stricture, in the role of that job, what does that mean to the students who are trying to make their own individual path? How are they being blocked? How does a school that hasn't been set up to make room for the LGBTQI community make room for Pharus, who has a queer body?

Coming-of-age is a hard story to tell because it's so individual. I mean, we all do it ... but we all do it in so many ways, you know? And particularly black men in America — I wanted to isolate that threshold and that moment. And then, again, you get into the notion of class, meaning, who are the 'talented tenth'? How are they identified? Who do we point to and say ... 'These will be our leaders for tomorrow,' right? And who does that selecting and why?

"I like to deal with things in equal opposites ... I wanted to do it in the setting of institutions that the black community holds dear. We hold education very dear, and we also hold religion



extraordinarily close to the heart of the community; not just because of its spiritual uplifting but also because of the political grounding that it has had. The black church serves as a spiritual anchor and a political anchor for the black community. And, in that tradition, we pass down a lineage of music, of an oral tradition, through young men who often must be duplicitous in nature.

We look at culturally effeminate boys, and we don't talk about them as human beings. We think of them as great singers and extraordinary musicians and talents, but their lives, who they are as people, is left outside of our conversations or our cultural consciousness, even to this day—which struck me because it's not like it happens in a vacuum. What we deem as effeminate or feminine traits start and continue early on. We try to mold and shape them into something else, and when it doesn't happen, we get silent about it.

That's extraordinary to me, because I thought, "How is it possible that we can celebrate someone, celebrate what makes him individual, but also keep trying to make him somehow fit into the middle?" It's a universal thing. It doesn't just happen in the black community—it happens in all communities.

I was interested in the cross-section of African-American young men growing into manhood in today's society. And oftentimes there's this depiction of sort-of their more physical and urban life, but not necessarily what it's like for them to handle the traditions passed on to them from African-American culture, and what they're expected to hold and hold on to when becoming men. I was interested in that portrait, in how we prepare people who are constantly told to remember they're part of a particular group but also asked to be individuals. Are we allowing their individuality or are we hampering it? How do we connect with young people and ask them to flourish and be our leaders of tomorrow? Are we allowing them the space to do that? Are we really understanding their needs and connecting to them as young people? Are we allowing them to be children, or are we hampering them by putting way too many restrictions on their ability to grow by asking them to take on so many responsibilities?"

"The mythical school we've created centers around the legacy of Negro spirituals. Negro spirituals are some of the greatest treasures in terms of the cosmology of the black experience in this country over the last 500 years. And to be handed that legacy and to hold onto that tradition while also becoming your own self is a pretty hard navigation negotiation. And then we get introduced to Pharus, a young queer man, who is charged with leading that legacy in this high school. And what does that mean for him? How does he find his space, his own voice?"

"We used Negro spirituals because they have such a legacy of both spiritual and political importance. They are a treasure in the African American experience in this country. When we talk about our myths, our legends, our mythology, our gifts; these songs are a part of them. When we entrust them into the hands of our young people, what does that mean for us? How do we give them that responsibility without taking away their individuality? Is there a pressure put on them to be like we were or do we allow them to be their own selves and still carry the mantle of this incredible music."

MUSIC

Spirituals originated as folk songs long before the war. Biblical references to heroes battling stronger foes and people in bondage (Old Testament) clearly parallels the conditions of slavery. Enslaved people used spirituals to transcend the physical world, forging a spiritual universe distinct from the material world. In the process they used music to lend meaning to their circumstances. Folk spirituals were transmitted orally and therefore hold many variations. The same song could have vastly different meanings according to the occasion, the geographic region, and the way it was performed and so a spiritual was not only sacred, but also secular. One example of their secularity lies in the theory that they were used as modes of coded communications to baffle white people and conceal messages.

Stylistically, spirituals were related to slave shouts, ring dances, and chants of African origin; Anglo-American hymnody; and camp meeting songs. Camp meetings were an offspring of the evangelical movement in America. By the 1830s revivals were part of mainstream American culture. Spirituals reflected African worldviews as applied to distinctly American compositions, in music that fused African modes of

performance with Euro-American musical styles. This made them uniquely American as African American creations, rooted in African American lived experiences.

During the 1860s, white Union officers published descriptions of what they heard from the black soldiers which piqued interest, leading to the first anthology being published in 1867 (*Slave Songs of the United States*). After the Civil War black men and women were performing by the hundreds and the spiritual connected the diverse genres of black entertainment between 1870-1890.

Spirituals can be categorized in one of three categories:

CALL AND RESPONSE: a leader begins a line, which is then followed by a choral response; often sung to a fast, rhythmic tempo.

Examples in this production: while slower in tempo, *Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child* and *Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder* may be considered call and response.

SLOW AND MELODIC: songs, sung solo or by a group, with sustained, expressive phrasing, generally slower tempo.

Examples in this production: *Trust and Obey*, *I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray*, *Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child*, *There Is A Fountain*, *I've Been In The Storm So Long* and *Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder*

FAST AND RHYTHMIC; songs, sung solo or by a group, that often tell a story in a faster, syncopated rhythm based upon the swinging of head and body.

Examples in this production: *Eye on the Prize (Hold On)*, *Rockin' Jerusalem*

The structure also includes:

- Mix of first-person declaration and metaphor that communicates in images rather than through narrative.
- Rhyme schemes are erratic, a result of compositional practice rooted in improvisation.

The most common includes:

- Chorus + verses of four lines / verses only / two-line verses + refrain
- Rhythmic spirituals usually have a duple meter (counted in two and four).



Chorus, rather than verses, launch the song. Verses often have an “internal refrain” (Ex: “Swing Low Sweet Chariot”). “Wandering refrains” were created by Richard Allen in 1786. They were short, easy to learn, choruses that singers could attach to any hymn they wished. This allowed everyone to participate, even if they didn’t know the verses. Refrains in spirituals functioned similarly. The chief characteristic of the spirituals is melody. As noted by composer and scholar John W. Work III: Performers often regard melody with “free attitude” in which “repetitions of the refrain or verses are most always varied.”

You cannot talk about spirituals without mentioning the Fisk University Jubilee Singers. This was the first organized troupe of African American performers to share spirituals with the larger United States.

In 1871 the Jubilee Singers, black students from Fisk University, toured the country singing spirituals to raise money for their school. As Fisk Dean, H. H. Wright noted in 1911: “[At first,] There was a strong sentiment among the colored people to get as far away as possible from all those customs which reminded them of slavery... [the students] would sing only ‘white’ songs.” For years many Blacks ignored the spiritual because they looked on it as a relic and reminder of slavery, rather than a symbol of determination and fortitude. White-sponsored schools professed goals of racial uplift and self-determination. Which is why the singers originally followed the old route of the Underground Railroad to Ohio; so as to encounter sympathetic audiences. The date that spirituals entered the Fisk Jubilee repertoire is unknown. It is believed that it was after 1871. Public demand for spirituals was heightened when a volume of 24 spirituals called *Jubilee Songs*, as Sung by the Jubilee Singers was published in 1872.

In 1909 the Fisk Jubilee Singers recorded “There is a Balm in Gilead” spiritual. Almost instantly a single voice became a mosaic of rich harmonies. The a cappella singing gave added emphasis to the lyrical quality of these trained voices. Each voice was so carefully modulated that even as the group delivered the chorus in unison, no single voice dominated. As with most groups, there is safety in numbers. Extra voices camouflage vocal deficiencies. The Drew choir is also an a cappella choir – no musical accompaniment. The countertenor is the highest male voice and the bass is the lowest. With tenor and baritone in between.

What evolved from the Jubilee Singers was The Concert Spiritual. There was a translation process required, both musical and cultural, to move from riverboats, fields, and camp meetings to concert stages. Converting participatory experiences into presentational performances took the form from improvisational compositions and placed it into standardized musical works. Regarding music as an extension of worship, choirs also removed spontaneous singing from religious fellowship. Emphasizing the importance of education and bringing greater structure and restraint to worship. For the young men of Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys, the choir serves as a central example of the excellence the school hopes to instill in its students – excellent in that a choir, comprised of many, works as one.

Previously a source of divisiveness between middle- and working-class blacks, vernacular music was gradually now becoming a source of race pride across the spectrum of class. The music had become not simply a form of religious expression but a key source of African American identity and hope and students have a desire for self-expression. The primary arguments revolved around commercialized culture vs. cultural resource and showmanship vs. community. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s & 1930s propelled the black nationalist arts movement. This movement rejected the notion of conforming to standards of white civilization by tailoring their musical heritage to the more typically white structures as a way of increasing the financial gains.

In the 1940s, growing commercialism caused particular alarm within the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses (NCGCC), whose members perceived it as eroding the music’s religious significance. However, the value of the style has not been lost on the youth. Gospel scholar and practitioner Horace Boyer points to one source of the music’s continuing power in a description of its appeal among black college students:

Gospel and spirituals had become aligned under the rubric of black sacred music [in post-war era]. Gospel music is the unifying element of Black students all over the campuses of the United States. Gospel choirs began on college campuses to provide some continuity between the black church and the academic life, but students found that they liked it and wanted to perpetuate its existence. On many predominantly white campuses...the gospel choir is the one visible evidence of the presence of Black students. They’re not in the theatre group; they’re not in the symphony orchestra; they’re not in the ballet troupe. They are in the gospel choir because they find, through it, some means of expression.

Other educational institutions such as universities incorporated music in their extra curricular offerings. Some examples include Howard University in Washington DC, Fisk University in Tennessee, Hampton University in Virginia, Livingstone College in North Carolina, and Lincoln University in Pennsylvania.

Some notable figures who advanced these institutions include:

- Fisk (1866) - Jubilee Singers and Jubilee songs
- Hampton (1868) - the personality of General Samuel Chapman Armstrong
- Tuskegee (1881) - the inspiring story of the rise from a little slave boy into the strong American citizen of world honor, Dr. Booker T. Washington.

EDUCATION



Public schools were first established in the United States in the 19th century. A uniform, organized system of public education did not take shape until the 1840s. Only white children received an education until slavery was abolished. Until legislatures in the southern states agreed to fund public education for all citizens, the creation of schools for African Americans was shouldered largely by various northern philanthropic organizations. One of the most active philanthropies in early black education was the American Missionary Association, which started a school for blacks in Nashville, TN in 1865. Their hope was to develop contributing citizens through education.

Within the growing number of black educational institutions, education became

a vehicle not only for acquisition of knowledge but also for the proliferation of values such as thrift, refinement, and industriousness. Outlook geared toward upward mobility. Strategies pursued by the growing Black middle class placed particular emphasis on education. The pervasiveness of racist ideologies led African Americans to build an impressive array of institutions to address their own social, economic, and political needs. These institutions included not only churches and religious institutions but also schools, businesses, and mutual benefit societies. While these institutions failed to dismantle racism, they fostered a sense of community to combat prejudice for African Americans. The advent of all-black academic institutions was a liberating educational event that reinterpreted their identity; both how they saw themselves and how others perceived them.

To understand ourselves, the other, and ourselves in relation to the other; the learning process inherently requires a process of self-reflection. The forefathers of the American intelligentsia believed that this is best achieved through dialogue. They all discussed ideas frequently and freely through speeches, debates, writings, and lectures. Transforming the consciousness of the oppressed through reflection.

3 Factors to explain the role race plays in school achievement:

- Culture
- Parental socioeconomic status
- School context

Culturally, what we see in this country is black people:

- Not represented in higher-level courses
- Overcoming obstacles to be accepted and noticed
- Understanding how to leverage support systems on campus is a priority
- Must have the ability to cope in a hostile environment, garner support of colleagues, and treat people with respect and dignity regardless of whether that treatment is reciprocated.

In terms of socioeconomic status, black male students in poverty have setbacks to keep them from realizing what they're passionate about. Structural disadvantages increase the likelihood of poverty and thereby lead to poorer school conditions. Marginalized students have more threat to forming an academic identity. Recognizing other forms of oppressions such as class and gender is also important when looking at how social status informs success.

School context refers to the systems any educational institution employs to create the types of students they want. Black students will typically internalize a fear of being minimized to a stereotype. This becomes personally threatening, especially if experienced during a performance (i.e. test, presentation, etc.) the emotional reaction directly interferes with the performance. Often, students will shut down or retreat away from these environments; forgoing academic success in the face of adversity.

The idea of “grit” comes up again and again when discussing academic success in the black community. Grit is embodied by students who overcome difficulties via passion and persistence. The term is often used synonymously with “rugged individualism” in the way that individual effort is the key determinant for one’s future outcomes. A level of resilience is required that often plays out by students leveraging peers, family members, mentors, and spirituality along their journey to success.

Many studies have revealed the following patterns in the lives of black students:

Roads to Success:

- Fosters self-discovery
- Networks of support
- Motivation toward degree completion
- Provides opps for co-curricular involvement

Success is brought about by:

- Supportive parents
- Positive school environment + caring teachers
- Peer support
- Community initiatives

Challenges to retention:

- Social and emotional need for diversity are not met
- Affected by family concerns
- Ability to achieve academic success
- Lack of confidence in “the system”



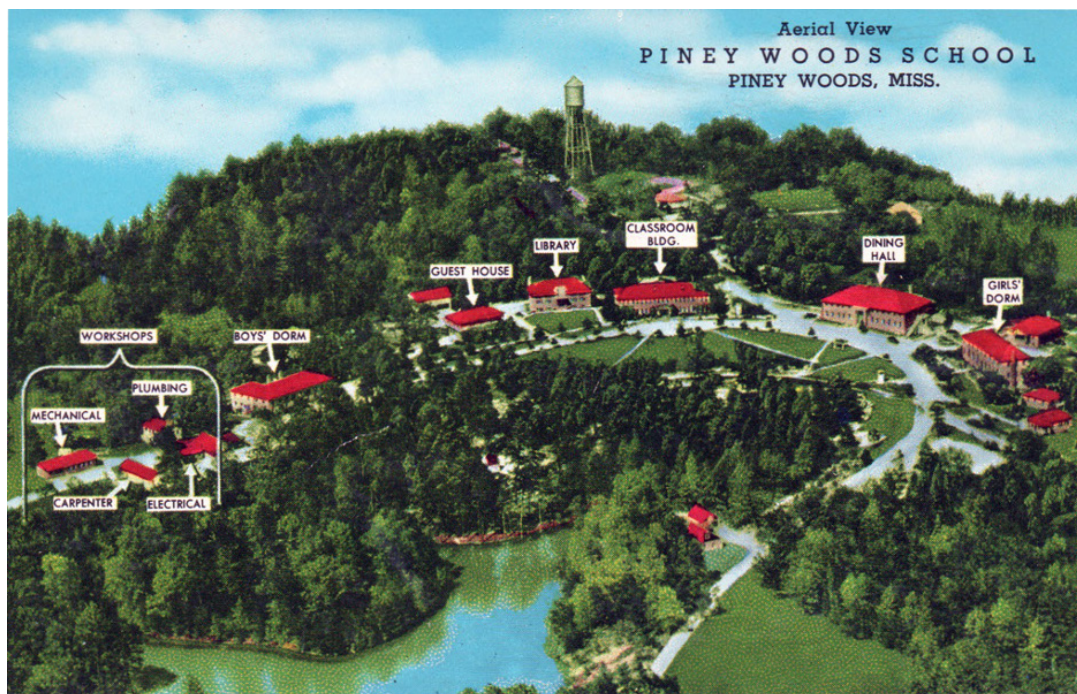
School disciplinary policies and teacher bias lead to time out of the classroom and development identities associated with failure and punishment. More likely for subjective offenses like disrespect or perceived threat as opposed to objective, like smoking or vandalism. This contributes to a system which funnels black men into the criminal justice system.

Because of social conditioning, African American students are more likely to seek help from small cooperative groups. High achievers do so as members of peer groups. However, black males equaled less than 6% of the entire U.S. undergraduate population in 2010. Therefore, understanding of students’ cultures and that it can change and adapt under different environmental contexts is necessary to the forming of these support systems. As for the teachers, most didn’t think white teachers shouldn’t teach black students; but they should do so with knowledge of black contributions. This led to the educational movement known as Afrocentricity which posits that freedom takes the form of African Americans using education to reclaim their knowledge of self that has been hidden from them. It is a commonly accepted thought that pride and honor felt in a student will cause that student to hesitate to do mean things lest they sully the legacy of the school’s excellence.

SCHOOLS

Boarding schools are private schools where students also live. These residential schools bring together students from all different states and even countries to live and learn in one environment. Students live in dormitories, similar to the college experience. Often, because students live on campus, there are more opportunities for them to participate in after-school activities, as well as weekend and evening events. Boarding school opens up more opportunities for involvement at school than a day school and can give students more independence as they learn to live on their own without their parents in a nurturing and supportive environment, which can make the transition to college much easier. In the infancy of the United States of America, schooling for young people, such as it was, was provided by small, private schools, not public schools until the 19th century.

Black boarding schools evolved from agricultural and industrial training schools into college preparatory academies. Prior to desegregation, there were nearly 100 black boarding schools in the U.S. established by local blacks, religious organizations and philanthropists when local governments failed to provide schools for black children. Of these, today only four remain in operation. The four are Laurinburg Institute in North Carolina, Pine Forge Academy in Pennsylvania, Piney Woods in Mississippi, and Redemption Christian Academy located in New York. Their geography alone is both a gift and curse. It allows each to have a strong territory of its own, but makes it virtually impossible to engage in joint activities like athletics given the cost of travel for institutions that are largely cash-strapped.



The Piney Woods Country Life School is America's largest historically black boarding school, with a sprawling campus of pine trees and rolling farmland 20 miles south of Jackson, Mississippi. It opened in 1909 as the vision of an educated African-American man from St. Louis who felt a desire to teach the illiterate children of freed slaves how to farm and read. In the face of hunger, poverty, and lynching threats, Dr. Laurence Jones and his wife fought to keep the school open in the segregated South. Now,

more than 100 years later, the vocational agriculture school has transformed into a rigorous, college-prep high school for low-income African-American students from across the United States.

Regardless of setting, private or public, as poet and scholar Nikki Giovanni so clearly articulates, "if there has been one overwhelming effort made by Blacks since the beginning of the American sojourn, it has been the belief in the need to obtain education. The laws that were made against our reading, voting, holding certain jobs, living in certain areas, were made not because we were incapable . . . no one tells a man or a woman, "You can't read," unless there is the knowledge that if that person becomes educated, he or she will no longer be my slave; will no longer sharecrop my land; will no longer tolerate injustice. . ."

Single-Sex Schools can be boarding or day schools, but focus on the aspects of living and learning that best support one gender. It is only within the last decade that our society has seen the need to provide single-gender classrooms for boys; recognizing single-gender classrooms as one situation to help black

males succeed in school. Black boys learning style requires more movement and energy. Teachers' sensitivity to black boys' behavior increases the likelihood of their success.

CHARLES R. DREW PREP SCHOOL FOR BOYS

Playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney's school may be fictitious but Charles R. Drew was real and his legacy has inspired numerous schools across America to take his name.



In Drew's biographical information from the American Chemical Society, Drew is noted as having broken "barriers in a racially divided America to become one of the most important scientists of the 20th century. His pioneering research and systematic developments in the use and preservation of blood plasma during World War II not only saved thousands of lives, but innovated the nation's blood banking process and standardized procedures for long-term blood preservation and storage techniques adapted by the American Red Cross. Ironically, the Red Cross excluded African Americans from donating blood, making Drew himself ineligible to participate in the very program he established. That policy was later modified to accept donations from blacks; however the institution upheld racial segregation of blood, which throughout the war Drew openly criticized as "unscientific and insulting to African Americans." Born in Washington, D.C. in 1904, Drew died tragically in 1950, after falling asleep while driving to a conference. He was given a blood transfusion at an all-white hospital but succumbed to the injuries.

David Pilgrim, Curator of the Jim Crow Museum, on the campus of Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan, adds further, "[the hospital where Drew was brought was] Alamance General Hospital, a facilities-poor white hospital. The white doctors at Alamance began work immediately

on [Drew but his] injuries were so severe and his loss of blood so great that he could not be saved. Drew's family later wrote letters to the attending physicians thanking them for their efforts. Almost immediately rumors spread that Dr. Drew, the internationally famous inventor of the blood bank, had died because a white hospital refused to give him a blood transfusion. To many African Americans the story was believable. In 1950 the South was still rigidly segregated, and Black Americans were often denied treatment in hospitals — sometimes because the hospitals did not have vacant "Negro beds," and sometimes because the hospitals were for whites only. Drew received emergency medical attention, but many Black Americans did not."

There was a movement in the 1990s in the southern United States to change the names of schools that were named for former Confederates and change them to be named for those who advanced our society. Many schools adopted Charles R. Drew as their new namesake.



MASCULINITY

Blackness, like maleness, is a social construct. Gendered representations of blackness embedded in American pop culture and media characterize black men as innately angry and violent. Black masculinity in cinema and media led to Blaxploitation. Blaxploitation refers to any popular media that depicts black people in disproportionately stereotypical roles. Recognizing this trend has led us to seek the ethical construction of race and gender, rather than the social construction. In seeking the ethical construction, one must acknowledge the “double consciousness” between race and nation. Anxiety of double consciousness cultivates a desire for fraternal energy.

The first, commonsense component of community is territory. When groups of people gather, they discover what they share in common, this shared territory is how communities are formed. In youth or school settings, the typical assertion of acceptance into a community is based loosely on the idea of coolness.

Coolness is the ritualized expression of masculinity that involves speech, style, and physical and emotional posturing. Coolness creates the illusion of acceptance that ensnares people in a process of self-sabotage and destruction.

4 Reasons to adopt postures of coolness:

- 1) Strategy for navigating the world
- 2) System to establish their own manhood
- 3) Source of resilience
- 4) Form of aggression, strength, and power

Language is used to assert each posture of coolness. For example, an individual’s relationship to the term “nigga” is a point of conflict in *Choir Boy*. The term is used both to demoralize and uplift. It is clear why Mr. Pendleton is vehemently against the term to be used. From the perspective of a White gaze, the term will never be heard as “nigga” but rather “nigger” and will always been seen as a weapon to dehumanize. However, as the students point out, from the perspective of the Black gaze, “nigga” is a term of endearment and recognition of brotherhood. This scene, as most in the play do, reinforces the fact that there is more than one kind of boy, and more than one type of brotherhood that is formed amongst a community.

However, the black community has not been exempt from discriminating against homosexuals. Violence for living openly gay remains a reality which leads many toward keeping their sexual life private in local communities.

2 Movements critical to the “closeting” of black gay life:

- 1) The rise of the Black Power movement (1960s)
 - a) Promoted homosexuality “as a ‘white disease’ that had ‘infected’ the black community”
 - b) Argued that homosexuality undermined power and authority of black masculinity
- 2) Riots and unrest of the 1960s
 - a) Businesses and institutions were forced out or burned down so the few remaining were churches
 - i) Black church is considered BOTH the most homophobic institution within the Black community AND the most tolerant
 - 1) This is the paradox that leads to “don’t ask, don’t tell”

Homosexuality is both present and detached from the black man and black community. It is seen as a deviation from and threat to black masculinity. Therefore, many people feel an initial apprehension that rejection could follow disclosure of their sexual identity. These sentiments are often reinforced by the media when the examples of homosexuality are depicted from jails via violence and rape. Even though the term “homosexual” was coined in 1869, there is a coding of male homosexuality that continues to conceal individuals for their protection against adversity.

What is distinctive about the “modern” (gay/egalitarian) culture conception and social organization of homosexuality is the combination of:

- 1) A consciousness of group distinctiveness,
- 2) Separate institutions and culture (de-assimilation) based on,
- 3) Possibilities of egalitarian (not gender-role-bound or involving the submission of the young)
- 4) Exclusive (not bisexual) same-sex relations.

Currently young people have begun to situate the re-coding of black masculinity as racial and class responsibility. It is often the disobedient teenager who is the catalyst for this type of change in societal ideologies.

GLOSSARY

- **Annals**

A record of events, year by year.

- **Andis**

Andis Company, a family held business founded in 1922, is a manufacturer of handheld tools to trim, cut, curl, straighten and dry hair.

- **Barbershops**

As writer Feathers Scott notes, “though barber shops are often thought of as a “boy’s club,” they’ve long played a pivotal role in both the economic and cultural development in African American communities. Many would even argue that the barbershop has reinforced black male identity in America. A barber shop is much more than a place to go for a haircut, it’s a second home, a town hall, a place of refuge and a place of healing.”

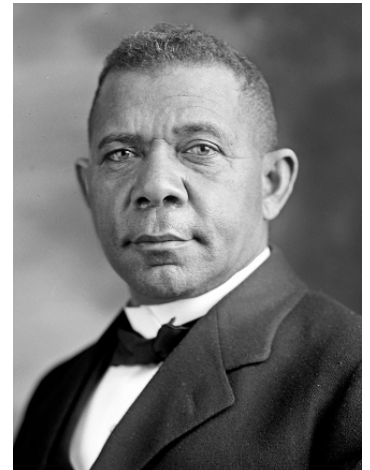
- **Battle of Tours**

In 732, near Poitiers, France, Frankish leader Charles Martel, a Christian, defeated a large army of Spanish Moors, halting the Muslim advance into Western Europe.

- **Booker T. Washington**

Booker Taliaferro Washington (1856-1915) rose from slavery to a position of power and influence. A realist and a man of action, he became one of the most important African-American leaders of his time. He was committed to improving the lives of African-Americans after the Civil War. Washington advocated economic independence through self-help, hard work, and a practical education. His drive and vision built the Tuskegee Normal (a term used to define an institution focused on the training of teachers) and Industrial Institute, located in the Alabama city of the same name, into a major African-American presence and place of learning.

In the late 1930s, the military selected Tuskegee to train African-American pilots because of its commitment to aeronautical training. It had instructors, facilities, and a climate for year-round flying. In 1965, Tuskegee Institute was designated a national historic landmark. Congress authorized the establishment of Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site in 1974. In 1985, the school changed its name from Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute to Tuskegee University.



- **Colombo**

A reference to the New York-based mafia family of the same name.

- **CPT – Colored People Time**

The term reflects the juxtaposition between being ‘in time’ and being ‘on time’. The first posits being present to the ‘now’ – in touch with human events/feelings and other natural rhythms – while the former is that of a fabricated time, requiring one to be a “slave” to the clock. CPT is to remain in ‘the now’ even if it means to be late ‘on the clock’.

- **Harriet Tubman | Underground Railroad**

The Underground Railroad's best known conductor, Harriet Tubman (1822-1913), was also a suffragist, a warrior, and a caretaker. From her own self-emancipation on the eastern shore of Maryland to her heroic service during the Civil War, her advocacy for the rights of women and African Americans, and her work to care for the poor and homeless in her community, Harriet Tubman's unswerving determination changed the lives of countless Americans, making her a towering figure in our nation's history.

Born into slavery, Tubman was named Araminta by her enslaved parents, Ben and Rit Ross. Changing her name to Harriet upon her marriage to freeman John Tubman in 1844, she escaped five years later when her enslaver died and she was to be sold. Vowing to return to bring her family and friends to freedom, she spent the next ten years making about 13 trips into Maryland to rescue them. She also gave instructions to about 70 more who found their way to freedom independently.

Tubman successfully used the skills she had learned while working on the wharves, fields and woods, observing the stars and natural environment and learning about the secret communication networks of free and enslaved African Americans to affect her escapes. She later claimed, "I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can't say — I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger." Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison called her "Moses," and the name stuck.

The Underground Railroad was the term given to the antebellum network of black and white abolitionists and safe houses that provided clandestine escape routes for fugitive Southern slaves on their way to the North and Canada.

Beginning in the 17th century and continuing through the mid-19th century in the United States, enslaved African Americans resisted bondage to gain their freedom through acts of self-emancipation. The individuals who sought this freedom from enslavement, known as freedom seekers, and those who assisted along the way, united together to become what is known as the Underground Railroad. Despite the illegality of their actions, people of all races, class and genders participated in this widespread form of civil disobedience.

There is no way of knowing how many African Americans traveled the Underground Railroad but it is generally thought to be at least 100,000



- **Headmaster**

Coined in the United Kingdom in the mid 1500's, the term is similar in both role and responsibilities to what we, as Americans, are familiar with the position of school principal. The difference being that the term headmaster (or headmistress) implies that the institution of learning is private while principal is that of a public school's or charter school's chief administrator. Headmasters have many of the same responsibilities as principals, but they may engage in additional activities such as fund-raising.

- **Kanye West**

Kanye West is a hip hop artist and owner of an apparel and footwear company who made headlines in 2016 with erratic behavior at his concerts, within award ceremonies and press conferences, and, finally with a 'psychiatric emergency' requiring an extended stay in a medical facility.

- **Keep your hand on the plow | Keep your eyes on the prize | Yes we can**

Within Pharus' explanation of his essay for Mr. Pendleton, playwright McCraney's concise yet poetic blend of these three maxims manages to sum up aspects of the African American experience from slavery to the Civil Rights Movement and into the presidency of Barak Obama.

- **Kith and Kin Cloth**

A term used to describe cloth or clothing used in a male masturbatory act.

- **KKK | The Klu Klux Klan**

The Klu Klux Klan (KKK) formed during Reconstruction at the end of the Civil War. Taking its name from the Greek word *kyklos*, from which comes the English "circle"; *klan* was added for the sake of alliteration, the all-white male 'fraternal organization' quickly mobilized as a vigilante group to intimidate Southern blacks - and any whites who would help them - and to prevent them from enjoying basic civil rights. Titles (like imperial wizard and exalted cyclops), hooded costumes, violent "night rides," and the notion

that the group comprised an “invisible empire” conferred a mystique that only added to the Klan’s popularity. Lynchings, tar-and-featherings, rapes and other violent attacks on those challenging white supremacy became a hallmark of the Klan. The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, founded by David Duke in 1975, has attempted to put a “kinder, gentler” face on the Klan, courting media attention and attempting to portray itself as a modern “white civil rights” organization.

- **Martin Luther King | Marches | Sit Ins**

Martin Luther King, Jr (1929-1968) in 1955 Dr. King, a Baptist minister, helped organize the first major protest of the African American civil rights movement: the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott. Influenced by Mohandas Gandhi, he advocated civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance (of which sit-ins and marches were strategic) to segregation in the South. The peaceful protests he led throughout the American South were often met with violence, but King and his followers persisted, and the movement gained momentum.



- **PETA**

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), founded in Maryland in 1980, is the largest animal rights organization in the world, with more than 6.5 million members and supporters. PETA works through public education, cruelty investigations, research, animal rescue, legislation, special events, celebrity involvement, and protest campaigns.

- **Psalm 139**

From the Biblical Old Testament, the Psalms are composed of sacred songs, or of sacred poems meant to be sung. Psalm 139 begins: *O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*

- **The Quiet Storm**

Taking its name from a Smokey Robinson album of 1974, quiet storm is a genre of radio-play that features ‘slow jams’ - slow, soulful, rhythm and blues and/or jazz infused music. The term has its genesis at Howard University in the 1970s.

- **Quo Vadis | Fade with a Clean Taper**

Haircut styles: the quo vadis is a close-crop cut, a fade cut is cut as close as possible then ‘fades’ or tapers into any length on top.



- **Shame The Devil | Calling Me Out My Name**

Pharus incorporates such maxims throughout his dialogue in *Choir Boy*. Within the foreword of her lexicon of phrases and words within the African American community, scholar Geneva Smitherman offers this scaffolding:

“The African American oral tradition is rooted in a belief in the power of the Word. The African concept of *Nommo*, the Word, is believed to be the force of life itself . . . Black Talk is the commonality that takes us across boundaries . . . African American English has its genesis in enslavement, where it was necessary to have a language that would mean one thing to Africans but another to Europeans . . . Africans in enslavement had to devise a system of talking to each other about Black affairs and about the [Oppressor] right in front of his face.”

Choir Boy’s use of spirituals and Step dance are further examples of communicative forms that can be deemed to have multiple meanings and readings.

- **Sweet honey in the rock**

Psalm 81:16 “. . . and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee. Luxuries as well as necessities would be forthcoming, the very rocks of the land would yield abundant and sweet supplies; the bees would store the clefts of the rocks with luscious honey, and so turn the most sterile part of the land to good account. The Lord can do great things for an obedient people. . .”

- **Willacoochie, GA**

Located in Southeast Georgia, the city has a population: 1,391

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Pre-Performance questions

1. How does a code of conduct limit or free us to function in a culture?
2. How do traditions and rituals dictate the future? What are the consequences when someone challenges established traditions?

Post-Performance Questions

1. How do the technical elements of scenic, costumes, sound and lighting enhance the play?
2. How is intersection of sexuality, religion, and race treated in the play?
3. Why are traditions and rituals important to Headmaster Marrow? What happens at the opening ritual?
4. How would you describe the code of conduct at Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys?
5. Explain the significance of the music in the play. How does the choir fit in the school's culture?
6. How would you describe the relationship between Pharus and Bobby? What moments illuminate their feelings about each other?
7. How does Pharus use his authority as lead of the choir? Explain why you agree or disagree with his choices.
8. How well do each of the characters know each other? What secrets are known and which secrets are kept?
9. How does Headmaster Marrow run his school? What pressures does he face?
10. How would you describe Mr Pendleton? What purpose does he serve in the play? What issues are discussed in the class with Mr. Pendleton? Why does Mr. Pendleton get upset at the Drew Choir students?
11. How would you describe the relationship between AJ James and Pharus? Why does AJ defend Pharus?
12. What do you think happens to the students in their senior year at the Drew School?

ACTIVITIES

Character Shield

Create a coat of arms for the school's shield. You have been commissioned by the board of directors of your school to create a shield or coat of arms. Each shield should be divided into four sections and a picture drawn for each of the following:

- a. In what academic subject does your school excel
- b. In what extracurricular subject does your school excel (ie. sports, arts, debate, etc)
- c. The school's mascot
- d. A motto for the school

After you have created a shield, distill the information to create a logo or icon that best represents your school. Make the logo or icon as striking as possible, but make sure that it conveys your school's values

Colorado Visual Art PG: Explain, demonstrate, and interpret a range of purposes of art and design, recognizing.

Colorado Visual Art PG: Explain, demonstrate, and interpret a range of purposes of art and design, recognizing that the making and study of art and design can be approached from a variety of viewpoints, intelligences, and perspectives.

Perspective Writing – Character Narrative

1. Have students select an important moment from *Choir Boy*. This should be a moment that has more than one person in attendance. For example, the first meeting of the choir or an exchange between Pharus and Bobby.
2. From this moment, the students are to pick a character from the play and, in their own words (paraphrase), provide the character's perspective and attitude of what transpired. Specifically, emotions, behavior, and how the moment affects the character should be explored.
3. From the exploration of a moment from the play, 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 they subtle or obvious variations? Did students agree on what was important to include and why? If not, how would the elimination of some elements change the way the moment would be understood or remembered by the character?

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.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The Denver Public Library recommends:

Read!

Since I Laid My Burden Down by Brontez Purnell. (2017)

Brontez Purnell, winner of the 2018 Whiting Award for emerging Fiction Writer, has written novels, zines, danced gogo, played guitar in punk bands. In this his fourth semi-autobiographical novel we follow DeShawn as he returns home for a funeral. His home in Baptist county Alabama, his home where his mother is a Preacher, his home where he can't get away from the past no matter how far away a punk warehouse in Oakland might seem. This could be Pharus if he chooses to leave the church like DeShawn does.

Watch!

Amazing Grace: Aretha Franklin (2019)

Gospel music that gives "strength and spiritual nourishment", as Pharus says, was at the center of Aretha Franklin's best-selling album, called *Amazing Grace*. At the same time as the 1972 album was recorded live in church, Franklin's performance was filmed but only released last year. Franklin's versions of well-known songs show her creativity and ability to uplift others. See how she responds to the audience and backing choir, see her sweat as she throws her whole self into the songs she clearly loves, and see her interactions with her preacher father. This is Franklin at the top of her game in a can't-miss performance.

Listen!

When I Reach that Heavenly Shore: unearthly black gospel 1926-1936 (Tompkins Square, 2014)

This three disc collection is gleaned from Christopher King's vast collection of 78s, and remastered by him; many of these are the only digital releases of these seminal songs. This early style of gospel music sounds very little like the gospel we know today, this gospel was scatological, early r&b and considered some of the first examples of rock n' roll. These songs are plaintive, mournful, ecstatic and powerful, just as Pharus wants to leave spirituals as beautiful songs that lift the spirit King leaves a dearth of information about the original artists, a core tenet of gospel is its joyful anonymity. While these songs may not have led slaves to freedom they unarguably laid the foundation for the civil rights movement with classics like "This Little Light of Mine" and "We Shall Overcome".

Download!

Tongues Untied: Giving a Voice to Black Gay Men (dir. Marlon Riggs, 1989; streaming on Kanopy)

From landmark filmmaker Marlon Riggs comes this groundbreaking visual blend of essay, poetry, music, and performance that lionizes the voices -- and celebrates the existence -- of black gay men. Born from the work of James Baldwin and spawning the likes of Barry Jenkins and Tarell Alvin McCraney, the minds behind the 2016 hit film *Moonlight*, *Tongues Untied* aims to untangle many of the prejudices and expectations placed on black men, especially in an LGBTQ landscape that more often than not excludes them. In a *New York Times* review, critic Wesley Morris calls the piece an "unclassifiable scrapbook of black gay male sensibility." Perhaps Pharus would identify with it as much as *Choir Boy's* playwright McCraney likely did.



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