



DENVER CENTER FOR THE
PERFORMING ARTS
Theatre Company

INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



WORLD PREMIERE MUSICAL

RATTLESNAKE KATE

RATTLESNAKE KATE SYNOPSIS

In 1925, Kate Slaughterback became world famous for facing down over 140 rattlesnakes – and living to tell the tale. But that’s just one part of her story. The musical opens with young Katie McHale leaving home to be the hero of her own story, with a place she can call her own and a man to share it with. When she meets Jack Slaughterback, she thinks she has everything she ever wanted. They get married, homestead a farm, and adopt a child. When a chance encounter with a rattlesnake migration makes Kate world famous, however, the cracks in the relationship begin to show. Is Jack really content with such a fierce and independent wife? Can Kate keep her fame, her farm, her man, and her independence?

COMPOSER/LYRICIST

Neyla Pekarek is a cellist and classically trained vocalist formerly of The Lumineers. Pekarek the musician turned to Kate, the historic figure, as muse for her solo debut, “Rattlesnake” (S-Curve Records/BMG). She happened upon the true story of the frontierswoman, who singlehandedly killed 140 snakes as they encroached on her and her son, at Greeley, CO’s History Museum. While doing her research, Neyla dove deep into Kate’s life by reading through hundreds of letters Kate wrote. The album journeys from Americana to blues and even doo-wop, the latter an extension of Pekarek’s previous stints in award-winning barbershop quartets. Produced by M. Ward (She & Him, Monsters of Folk), “Rattlesnake” is, in her words, “a song cycle with storytelling.”

BOOK WRITER

Karen Hartman’s work will launch VOLT at 59e59 Theaters in 2022, an unprecedented festival of three off-Broadway premieres by a single author simultaneously: *New Golden Age* (Primary Stages); *Goldie, Max & Milk* (MBL Productions); and *The Lucky Star* (The Directors Company). Hartman’s plays have been performed in New York at the Women’s Project, National Asian American



INSIDE OUT

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Rattlesnake Kate

Music and Lyrics by **Neyla Pekarek**

Book by **Karen Hartman**

Directed by **Chris Coleman**

Choreography by **Dominique Kelley**

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FEB 4 - MAR 13 WOLF THEATRE

Special thanks to the Greeley History Museum (greeleymuseums.com) and their Hazel E. Johnson Research Center, which houses the Kate Slaughterback Collection (1987.32), an archive of letters, news clippings, and family photographs.

This archive was instrumental in developing the musical *Rattlesnake Kate* and this study guide.

Theatre Company, P73, and Summer Play Festival, and at regional theaters including Cincinnati Playhouse, Dallas Theater Center, San Diego Rep, Theater J, the Magic, and elsewhere. They are published by Theater Communications Group,

Dramatists Play Service, Playscripts, Autumn House Press, Backstage Books, and NoPassport Press. A recent Guggenheim Fellow, Hartman lives in Brooklyn with her family.

LOCATION

Rattlesnake Kate was born near Longmont, Colorado, and spent most of her life on land she owned near Hudson and Ft. Lupton, Colorado (about halfway between Denver and Greeley). Kate operated a farm on this property – sometimes by herself, sometimes with the help of her son and one or two hired hands. The livestock and crops on her farm changed over time; she raised cows, hogs, horses, chickens, turkeys, goats (she believed goat milk was the secret to a long, healthy life) and grew corn, beans,

sugar beets, clover hay and wild hay – mostly as feed for her livestock. She also sold milk and butter locally.

Farming in Colorado's high plains is incredibly difficult. Water is scarce and few crops thrive in the dry soil. In her letters, Kate writes about how challenging farm life is and how hard she works, even in good times (and her farm saw a good share of bad times with droughts and extreme weather). She also loves her farm, though she rarely says so in print. "It is a great life, if you can stand it."

TIMELINE:

Some significant events in Kate's life.

- **July 25, 1893** Katherine Ruth McHale is born outside of Longmont, Colorado.
- **1895-96** Kate's mother dies when she's 2 or 3 years old. Kate's father never remarries.
- **c. 1909** Kate *might* have run away from home as a teenager and walked the Union Pacific rails to Red Cloud, Nebraska, where she supported herself washing dishes. From there, she made her way north and a little west to Deadwood, South Dakota. We can't know for sure if this happened, or if it's a colorful story she invented later.
- **c. 1911** When Kate was *about* 17, she was in love with a lawman named Lolly. She wanted to marry him, but her family objected to the match and wouldn't allow it.
- **1913** Kate (age 19) marries Claude Hampton in Denver. They divorce 3 years later (1916).
- **1918** Kate (age 24-25) marries H.H. Slaughterback (aka John, aka Jack) in Wyoming. Jack is from Longmont, Colorado. As far as we can tell, they married in Wyoming because that state's laws regarding divorcees re-marrying were more lax than Colorado's. They split in 1919. Then get back together in 1924. Then split again in 1930. They fought a lot. Mostly about money and Jack's gambling.
- **Nov. 10, 1921** Ernie Adamson is born. Kate adopts him within a year, though adoption papers were never formally filed.
- **c. 1920** Kate makes and sells moonshine somewhere on or near her property. Rumor has it that she hid the still in her goat pen to disguise the smell. At one point, she was arrested for bootlegging. Kate refused to leave Ernie in anyone else's care, so he spent the night in jail with her. We're not sure exactly what she made, but there was a popular local recipe for a moonshine made from sugar beets called "Sugar Moon."
- **Oct. 28, 1925** Kate stumbles into a rattlesnake migration and kills 140 rattlesnakes with a "No Hunting" sign she pulled out of the ground and used as a club. Ernie is 3 years old and watches the whole thing from atop Kate's horse, Brownie. After the attack, Kate collects

the dead snakes, skins them, and makes a dress out of them and a necklace out of their rattles. (The dress is currently on display at the Greeley History Museum.)

- **Sept. 16, 1931** Colonel Charles D. Randolph, aka “Buckskin Bill,” writes Kate for the first time after seeing her story in the *Blade & Ledger*, a Chicago-based monthly magazine that tended toward sensationalism and melodrama in its stories.
- **Summer 1932** Kate struck by lightning on her farm, knocked unconscious for five hours.
- **October 1939** Kate is attacked by a former hired hand. He showed up at her house causing trouble, so she took his gun out of his car and told him to come back for it in a day or two when he could “calm down and act like a man.” He came back the next day, still angry. In Kate’s words: “He started to call me dirty names so I told him he couldn’t talk like that to me in front of my boy or nowhere else but he kept it up. So I turned from the table and picked up my plate and threw it with all my might and struck him flat on his forehead and broke in a spray of china. And still he would not leave, so I picked up a dagger and made for him. I lacked about 2 inches of reaching his waistline as his gun came down on my head, which put me out for twenty-four hours and the sheriff and doctor was called and I was rushed to the hospital and he went to jail. Took 8 stitches to close the wound in my head and I will always have a nasty scar.”
- **1941** Ernie joins the military
- **1943** Kate marries Frank Pastelak. He dies in 1945.
- **1948** Kate marries Herman C. Garner in Mexico. They live in El Paso, Texas for a bit. We’re not quite sure how this marriage ended.
- **1951** Kate marries Don Bracy in Denver. We think this marriage lasted about a year.
- **1967** Kate writes that she was beaten and robbed of \$500, with a fractured skull. She lost her hearing and required 3 blood transfusions. No additional details about the attack, but it’s one of several significant injuries she suffers over the course of her lifetime.
- **Oct. 6, 1969** Kate dies in Greeley hospital after being sick for several weeks. Aged 76. A few weeks prior to her death, she presented the Greeley History Museum a dress and a pair of shoes she had made from the skins of the rattlesnakes she had killed in 1925, along with a necklace made of their rattles. It’s still on display at the Museum.
- **1970s** Colonel Randolph sends 19 poems he wrote in Kate’s honor to the Greeley History Museum. He also asks a distant cousin to write a book based on Kate’s life, but the project never takes off. Kate’s letters to Colonel Randolph are given to the Greeley History Museum and become part of the archive.

WRITING ABOUT HISTORY

History can be great source material for plays, musicals, novels, and movies. Writers face several challenges, however, when crafting story from historical documents. Research about a real person is a great place to start, but for most historical figures, there will be gaps in the information you can find about them. In the case of Rattlesnake Kate, most of what we know about her comes from letters she wrote to Colonel Charles D. Randolph, aka “Buckskin Bill,” for almost forty years. These letters, along with newspaper articles, family photos, and her rattlesnake skin dress are housed at

the Greeley History Museum. Kate tells us a lot about her farm, her relationships, and her day-to-day life. The letters are a fantastic way to get to know Kate, but they don’t tell the whole story. In order to tell Kate’s story in musical form, we have to read between the lines and ask a lot of questions, primarily about who Kate is writing to and how she wants to be seen and thought of. (Think of how you portray yourself in your social media feeds – it’s you, but it’s a particular version of you that doesn’t tell your whole story.) A writer has to make judgment calls about what and who to trust in the historical

record, then shape that into a storyline that audiences will find satisfying and relevant – musicals (along with novels and movies) have different rules than pure history. Sometimes we have to move events out of order, create characters, and use our imaginations to craft a satisfying story out of the clues history leaves us.

A writer also has to ask, “why is this story relevant here and now?” and make choices about what parts of the story will resonate with a contemporary audience. The musical *Hamilton* (2016) by Lin-Manuel Miranda is a great example of this. The tour’s tagline is “the story of America then, told by America now.” The musical tells the story of many of the founding fathers of the United States, using hip hop and rap music styles and with a majority BIPOC cast. By casting a Black actor to play George Washington, for example, the creators aren’t claiming that the real George Washington was actually

Black, but asking the audience to make comparisons between the ragtag group of underdogs and immigrants that founded this country in the late 18th century and what we know about race, power, and privilege today. They are also asking us to consider how many stories about People of Color individuals in history aren’t told. When you watch *Rattlesnake Kate*, you might want to think about what our casting choices say about the world Kate actually lived in AND the world we live in now.

Rattlesnake Kate started as an album of songs by composer Neyla Pekarek, who found inspiration in the real Rattlesnake Kate. Pekarek uses contemporary language and music styles, and the songs often speak to what she, as a 21st century woman, connects to in Kate’s story. Since then, Pekarek and playwright Karen Hartman have expanded that album into a full length musical telling Kate’s story.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

From the year Kate was born (1893) to the year she died (1969), the world changed a lot. Some world events come up in the musical; some don’t, but probably informed her life nonetheless. Here’s a quick refresher of historical trends and events – in Colorado, the United States, and the larger world – that happened during her life. *Unless otherwise noted, the information below was collected from [oxfordreference.com](https://www.oxfordreference.com) and coloradoencyclopedia.org.*

Sugar Beets

Few crops grow well in the dry climate of Colorado’s high plains; sugar beets are an exception and dominated Colorado agriculture for much of the 20th century. Starting in 1899, factories to process beets into granulated sugar sprang up throughout Colorado. Cultivating this crop had wide-ranging political and socioeconomic ramifications.

The Colorado sugar beet industry expanded significantly as a result of the Spanish-American War (1898). Rooted in Cuba’s fight for independence from Spain, the war significantly increased US influence in the Pacific and the Caribbean, where sugar cane is a major export). By the end of this conflict, the United States

had effectively taken possession of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines (both Cuba and the Philippines later gained independence from the US). During and after the Spanish-American War, many Americans wanted locally sourced sugar instead of Caribbean-origin sugar, expanding the market for Colorado-grown sugar beets.

Treaties with Native American tribes were often violated in pursuit of white-controlled farmland to grow sugar beets. Members of Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, and Kiowa tribes were forced out of Colorado altogether to make room for sugar beets.

Processing sugar beets could be mechanized but growing them is incredibly labor-intensive and the process is very hard on the human body. Many white farmers felt that kind of physical labor was beneath them, so they looked elsewhere for cheap labor. Sugar beets were cultivated by a series of marginalized communities. These groups included: Native Americans shipped in from reservations and “Indian schools,” where Native children were sent to assimilate to white society after being forcibly removed from their Native

families; Mexican-origin communities, some who had live on their land in southern Colorado and New Mexico since before the US existed and some who migrated from further south; German Russian, Japanese, and Filipino immigrants and refugees; incarcerated people; and others.

More info: <https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/sugar-beet-industry>

Homesteading

The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed citizens over age 21 to claim up to 160 acres of land from the government by (1) filing a claim, (2) living on the land for 5 years, (3) building a home, (4) improving the land, and (5) farming it. Anyone who didn't want to meet these requirements could live on the land for 6 months and buy it for \$1.25/acre. Later laws increased the acreage for land that was too dry to farm or was primarily used for livestock. These laws were designed to encourage (primarily white) American families to move west and settle lands previously occupied by Native American tribes. We're not sure if Kate and her husband Jack homesteaded the land they lived on or bought it from the government or previous homesteaders.

Annie Oakley

Phoebe Ann Moses (sometimes Mosey) was born in 1860 in Ohio. Young Annie learned to hunt and shoot to provide for her family. At age 15, she challenged sharpshooter Frank Butler to a shooting contest and won. They fell in love, got married, and began performing together in shooting expositions, with her performing under the stage name "Annie Oakley." At one shooting exposition, she met and became friends with Sitting Bull, a Lakota chief who nicknamed her "Little Sure Shot." When Oakley and her husband Butler joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in 1885, Oakley became the star and Butler happily took on the role of her manager. They toured the United States and Europe with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show for decades. Oakley and Butler both died within three weeks of each other in 1926 (one year after Kate's battle with the snakes). Annie is the subject of the 1946 Irving Berlin musical *Annie, Get Your Gun*.

Colorado Labor Wars (1903-1905)

In 1894, the owners of a mine in Cripple Creek, Colorado extended the miners' eight-hour workday to a ten-hour workday without increasing pay. When the miners objected, the owners agreed to keep the eight-hour workday but insisted on reducing wages. This triggered a 5-month strike, eventually requiring the governor's intervention to resolve. Workers kept their 8-hour workday and the same daily wage. Workers in many trades – not just mining – unionized.

Starting in 1902, when a new pro-business governor was elected, Colorado saw a series of strikes across the state in mining and other industries. In Cripple Creek, miners went on strike in support of unionized workers at ore processing mills, in hopes that a mining strike would encourage the mine owners to pressure the mill owners to back down. Fearful of ceding too much power to the unions, the mine owners (for the most part) refused. Violence ensued. Homes of union members were burned to the ground; "scabs" (people hired to replace striking workers) were attacked on the job. The governor, allied with the mine owners and other business owners, sent National Guard troops (paid for by a committee of business owners) and declared martial law. The Guard arrested people for displaying pro-union posters, arrested the staff of a local pro-union newspaper, and confiscated weapons from union members. By 1904, the situation had deteriorated even further; when a bomb at a railroad depot killed 13 scabs, the owners blamed the union and organized rallies encouraging average citizens to kill or expel every union member. The National Guard surrounded the union hall and fired into it repeatedly until the union surrendered. Fifteen hundred union members were arrested and tried in military court – those who refused to give up their union cards were expelled from the state.

Spanish Flu (1918-1920)

In 1918, a new strain of the influenza virus broke out and spread throughout the globe. This flu killed at least 30 million people globally (some estimates run as high as 100 million), far more people than World War I.

Prohibition (1920-1933)

In the early 20th century, reformers throughout the nation believed alcohol was the root cause of many of society's ills. Temperance societies sought to discourage drinking and to make it illegal. Some of these societies were connected to utopian communities. Greeley, Colorado, for example, was founded with temperance (the avoidance of alcohol) as a founding principal. The town remained "dry" (meaning alcohol was banned inside the city limits) until 1972.

Colorado voted to prohibit the production, transportation, and sale of alcohol in 1916, 4 years before the United States ratified prohibition on a national scale. Both locally and nationally, women were a driving force in the temperance movement. Ironically, Prohibition opened up opportunities for women in the now-illegal alcohol industry, though probably not in ways the reformers hoped. Women had been banned from producing alcohol (and often from consuming it in public spaces) before Prohibition became a large part of the illegal production and trade of alcohol. Women smuggled booze, ran kitchen and backyard stills, and started drinking at home in larger quantities.

Nationally, the 18th Amendment to the US Constitution, which took effect in January 1920, banned the production, transportation, and sale of alcohol. Enforcement of Prohibition was difficult, at best. City, state, and federal jurisdiction often overlapped, and effective enforcement required all three levels to work together and to agree on who was paying for the enforcement efforts. This rarely happened. Organized crime grew substantially in this era, as enterprising bootleggers took the opportunity to manage the illegal alcohol trade in many major cities in this era.

By 1933, most Americans agreed that the experiment had failed, and the 21st Amendment officially repealed Prohibition in 1933 (though some Colorado counties and towns chose to continue banning alcohol in their districts).

Great Depression (1929-1939)

In October 1929, the US stock market crashed, leading to one of the worst economic depressions in global history. By the mid-1930s, 1/3 of the US workforce was unable to find work. The "New Deal," a series of government programs designed to ease the worst of the Depression, helped many find work and avoid starvation. The US economy didn't fully recover until World War II required significant increases in industrial production and military spending.

Dust Bowl (late 1930s)

Immense dust storms, made worse by several years of extreme drought, blew throughout Colorado, Kansas, Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, stripping soil from farmland across large swaths of the United States. The dust storms were so bad towns had to keep streetlights on during the day and many referred to the decade as the "dirty thirties." A few agricultural historians believe it was a naturally occurring phenomenon, like periodic droughts, but most blame dryland farming practices that removed native grasses and other plant life in favor of wheat and other crops. Without the plants that had evolved to keep the soil in place, the soil in these areas was carried hundreds of miles. In combination with the Great Depression, thousands of farmers in these dry regions were forced to migrate in search of work and food for their families. Many went to California, like the Joads, the fictional family at the center of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

THE ATTACK, in Kate's own words

(Reprinted with permission, Greeley History Museum, etc.)

In 1926 Kate wrote about her dramatic encounter with the rattlesnakes for an adventure writing contest. Here's how she describes the events of that day:

"On Oct. 28th, 1925 I and my little boy Ernest started on horseback to a lake where a few wounded ducks were left

by hunters the day before. Taking my 22 Remington rifle along to shoot them, as we neared the lake there is a fence so I dismounted to open the gate and heard the warning of a rattle-snake. Looking forward about 10 feet, I discovered a large rattle-snake all coiled and ready to attack

anything that came within reach. Stepping back to my horse I took my rifle from the saddle and shot this one, and soon I heard another, and another. Shooting three large rattlers in succession, thinking my rifle ample protection! Looking to one side, I saw several rattlesnakes coming toward me with heads erect and darting tongues, being aroused by the rifle shots and rattling of the wounded snakes. Knowing I could not kill all these with my rifle, I looked around for a stick or something to kill them with. Not being frightened by 20 or 30 I looked around and there not more than 20 feet from me was a sign "No Hunting Allowed" Keep Out! and I made a dash for it. On doing so I looked around to kill them, and I beheld a horrible sight! Rattle snakes coming at me from all directions. Almost paralyzed with fright, I stood still thinking they would not attack me, but on they came, and as they coiled to strike me I began a mad fight for my life. For several feet ahead, I beheld nothing but green-eyed serpents coming toward me. There was no way for me to escape their deadly fangs, if I should run through them – so I fought them with a club not more than 3 feet long, whirling constantly I fought them for over two hours before I could kill my way out of them and get back to my

faithful horse (Brownie) and little three year old Boy Ernie, who were staring at me during my terrible battle not more than 60 feet away. The 1st rattler I struck at as it sprang at me, I caught it with my club, and another sprang, just missing my hand by ½ inch. I could feel its breath as its jaws closed – looking behind me I saw one just raising its head to strike me in the calf of my leg. I struck backward and downward catching its fangs on my club. Killing 5 in this manner, not moving out of my tracks for one two hours I fought them frantically trying to get away from them. As I did so I had to use the last bit of strength I had to mount my faithful horse and ride 1 ½ miles home. There I told of my horrible experience, showing my blistered hands, red and swollen face and blood-shot eyes. Next day the news spread like wild fire, and every one that knew me for miles around came to see me and compliment me on my bravery. Soon a newspaper reporter came and had me string 140 dead rattle snakes on a wire, and have my photo taken. As the rattle-snakes are very thick in this part of Colorado, we don't feel it being much of a task to kill them. I saved my own life this time and also my little boys. But so far I have always been the victor."

THEMES

Relationship to the land

The musical opens with a land acknowledgment, honoring the Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes that lived in Northern Colorado before white settlers forced them off. At the beginning of the musical, Kate lives in wonder and curiosity at the land as she travels to Red Cloud and homesteads her farm with Jack. She also learns to live in awe at the power of the land – from rattlesnake migrations to droughts to windstorms and extreme cold temperatures. It's a difficult relationship, but possibly her most rewarding.

Fantasy versus reality

Both Kate and Buckskin Bill create personas, or alternate versions of themselves, to portray themselves to each other and to the world. These invented (or at least exaggerated) alter egos give both

an opportunity to live their best lives and become who they really want to be. But these fantasy versions of themselves may also be seen as dishonest and cause harm.

Women's rights and gender roles

Kate never fit into stereotypes of femininity and throughout her life she wanted and pursued things her society told her women should not want or have. She wants everything – independence, fame, a family, her farm, and for her life to matter. She struggles to find a romantic relationship in which she can really be herself. Throughout her life, she has to fight "against snakes of all kinds" (as playwright Karen Hartman tells it) to keep what's hers and to live the kind of life she wants.

In 1893, the same year Kate was born, Colorado women gained suffrage, or the

right to vote. This measure was passed by popular vote of the people, not by the legislature. The measure passed with significant contributions by Black women, especially Elizabeth Piper Ensley, who organized the Colorado Colored Women's Republican Club to educate Black women on how and why to vote.

Colorado was the 2nd state to grant women the right to vote – Wyoming was first (in 1869, when it was still a US Territory). Utah was 3rd (technically). Women could vote in Utah Territory by 1870 – before Colorado – but Utah wasn't a state until 1896. Nationally, the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920, guaranteeing that a citizen's right to vote "shall not be denied or abridged

by the United States or by any State on account of sex," meaning a woman's right to vote was now constitutionally protected. It's important to note that this amendment didn't always protect Black, Asian American, and Native American women, whose citizenship status was often questioned or denied – legally and illegally.

Legacy

As Kate gets older, she spends a little less time thinking about what she wants out of life and more time thinking about what her life added up to, how she wants her life to be remembered, and what future generations can learn from her story.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Iron horse is old slang phrase for a train.

In Colorado, I can vote. True – except that she's too young, as Pa points out. Women in Colorado could vote as of 1893; national suffrage for women came in 1920.

Red Cloud, Nebraska is about 400 miles east of Longmont, Colorado, where Kate was born. Red Cloud's population in 1909 was about 1600.

Silver spoons and **high hats** slang for rich people.

Acknowledge the corn say the obvious thing that no one wants to name (like naming the elephant in the room).

Pawnee Bill, Idaho Bill, Buffalo Bill, Bill Pickett were all real cowboys and showmen in the Old West. Buffalo Bill (William Cody) made his reputation fighting against Native Americans in the "Indian wars," then turned to acting and then running his own Wild West show (a popular form of entertainment that were a little bit circus, a little bit rodeo). Buffalo Bill's Wild West show merged with Pawnee Bill's version in 1909. Buffalo Bill is buried on Lookout Mountain, above Golden, Colorado. Idaho Bill (real name Barney Pearson) raised horses and broncos. Bill Pickett was a Black cowboy and movie star who invented "bulldogging" and was influential in rodeos.

Plow the water under Dryland farms get so little rain, none can be wasted. When it rained (or snowed), farmers would immediately plow, essentially burying the water to keep it from evaporating.

Goddamn this drought Colorado's high plains experienced severe drought through much of the 1930s.

Taradiddle is a lie; a **chiseler** is a cheater.

Promising tall. Making big promises that probably won't be kept.

Flannel mouth speak insincerely or deceptively

Coffee boiler someone who's too lazy to do their work (they'd rather hang around the coffee pot).

More information:

<https://truewestmagazine.com/article/idaho-bill/>
<https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/william-f-%E2%80%99Cbuffalo-bill%E2%80%99D-cody>
<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/pickett-bill-1870-1932/>
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=PA024>

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Pre-Performance questions

1. 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?
2. What are the purposes of telling historical fictions? How do the characters in the past comment on the times and values of the present? Who is a historical figure that you would write a historical fiction about?
3. If you could make an analogy or metaphor for obstacles you face in your life, what would it be? What obstacles do you find resurfacing, and in what ways do you approach in solving the obstacles?

Post-Performance Questions

1. How does the technical elements of scenic, costume, sound and lighting design enhance the story?
2. How do the music and lyrics convey the tone of the play? How do the songs convey the elements of emotion, character and story?
3. In what ways do the casting choices, the ensemble, and the use of historical fiction, add to the telling of the story?
4. How would you characterize the differences in the characters of Katie, Kate, and Katherine? What changes, if any, would you say have occurred?
5. What do the actual rattlesnakes represent in Kate’s life? Where do the other “snakes” appear and how does she approach them?
6. How is feminism celebrated and brought to the forefront of the play?
7. How would you describe the relationship between Kate and Ernie?
8. How would you describe the relationships that Kate has with the different men in her life; her father, Claude Hampton, Jack, and the Colonel?
9. How would you describe the relationship between Quincy Cullen and Kate? How does it change and what events happen to illuminate their relationship?
10. How does Cullen treat his fieldhands? Why does Ernie stay with Cullen?
11. Explain Kate’s attitude toward the “American Dream” and how homesteading fits into her relationship to the land.

ACTIVITIES

Historic Timeline

1. Ask students to research significant events in Colorado, the United States and the world leading up to, during and following the play *Rattlesnake Kate* 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.

Perspective Writing – Character Narrative

1. Have students select an important moment from *Rattlesnake Kate*. This should be a moment that has more than one person in attendance. For example, when Katie leaves her family for Longmont or a meeting between Kate and Cullen.
2. From this moment, the students are to pick a character from the story 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.

ACTIVITIES

Newspaper Reporter

Goal: Write an article about a scene that transpired on stage

Materials: Pen and Paper

1. The students are newspaper reporters from the town of Longmont. The reporters are to write a short article about one of the incidents from the play, *Rattlesnake Kate*. For example, the moment with the rattlesnakes, the incident with Cullen, or the courtroom scene.
2. Be sure to be able to answer the questions of who the article is about, what happened, where the incident happened, and why.
3. Rather than having the article cover only the facts, have the article be an editorial.
 - a. Remember that an editorial is opinionated.
 - b. After writing one side of the opinion, write the counterpoint.

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.

Press Conference – An improvisation game

1. The group gather and one student is selected to leave the room.
2. The group decides who the person is going to portray; a historical person, a celebrity, a sports icon, etc.
3. The first student re-enters the room and holds a press conference with the group asking leading questions to this student.
4. The press conference concludes when they deduce who they have been assigned.

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

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The Denver Public Library recommends:

Read!

Outlawed by Anna North

Ada has to leave her life behind, a life she loves, because her town distrusts barren women like her, hanging them as witches. She joins a band of outlaws that have created a safe haven for outcasts. Ada shares Kate's determination and courage as she fights to create a sanctuary town in the Wild West through increasingly violent means.

Watch!

Roots in the Sand, dir. Jayasri Hart (1998)

Want to know more about lesser-known people of the West? Find out about the Sikh and Hindu settlers of southern California who faced federal laws against owning land or marrying white women. Like Kate, they lived their lives as independent as allowed but not as free as they'd like at the turn of the 20th century. Aided by family photographs and archival footage, follow the loving and tough community they formed through generations.

Listen!

Bill O'Reilly's Legends & Lies: The Real West by David Fisher

A fascinating, eye-opening look at the truth behind the western legends everyone thought they knew. Included are the ten legends featured in Bill O'Reilly's 'Legends and Lies' docuseries; from Kit Carson to Jesse James, Wild Bill Hickok to Doc Holliday, accompanied by two bonus chapters on Daniel Boone and Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley. Read by Tom Wopat with an introduction read by Bill O'Reilly.

Download!

New Women in the Old West, From Settlers to Suffragists, an Untold American Story by

Winifred Gallagher, read by Blair Seibert

This account of how women shaped the American West from 1840 to 1910 is given a sweeping overview by Gallagher, drawing on an extraordinary collection of research, including personal letters and diaries. Blair Seibert narrates this look at how women from all ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds shaped the westward migration and her expressive voice makes this a satisfying listening experience.



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