STUDY GUIDE
SEASON FOUR

By NAMBI E. KELLEY
based on the novel NATIVE SON by RICHARD WRIGHT
Directed by PSALMAYENE 24

NATIVE SON

MOSAIC THEATER COMPANY
Introduction

“Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.”—Augusto Boal

The purpose and goal of Mosaic's education department is simple. Our program aims to further and cultivate students' knowledge and passion for theatre and theatre education. We strive for complete and exciting arts engagement for educators, artists, our community, and all learners in the classroom. Mosaic's education program yearns to be a conduit for open discussion and connection to help students understand how theatre can make a profound impact in their lives, in society, and in their communities.

Mosaic Theater Company of DC is thrilled to have your interest and support!

Catherine Chmura
Arts Education Apprentice—Mosaic Theater Company of DC

Written by Catherine Chmura, Khalid Y. Long, and Isaiah M. Wooden
PRESENTS

MOSAIC THEATER COMPANY of DC

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NATIVE SON

By Nambi E. Kelley

based on the novel NATIVE SON by

Richard Wright

Directed by Psalmayene 24

Set Designer: Ethan Sinnott
Lighting Designer: William K. D’Eugenio
Costume Designer: Katie Touart
Projections Designer: Dylan Uremovich
Sound Designer: Nick Hernandez
Properties Designer: Willow Watson
Movement Specialist: Tony Thomas*
Production Stage Manager: Simone Baskerville*
Dramaturg: Isaiah M. Wooden & Khalid Yaya Long

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Curriculum Connections: DC Public School

Taken from the DCPS Scope and Sequence Matrix for the 2018-2019 School Year

Grade 9 - Unit 1: Honorable Actions and Honorable Words
Students begin the year by thinking about what makes stories interesting, effective, and memorable. They will also begin exploring the high school theme, I am a Leader, by considering the role of honor, or “high esteem; respect”, in making a character admirable within a narrative.

Unit 2: Tension in Literature
In this unite, students will examine the ways in which mystery, tension, and surprise engage and intrigue readers, identify and describe ways authors ‘hook and hold’ readers through specific literary choices, and analyze the role of stories-within-the-story to create tension and advance the plot.

Grade 10 - Unit 4: Virtue and Morality
Students conclude the year by thinking about the language of Shakespeare – and further exploring the concept of leadership – through a study of the anchor text, Hamlet. In particular, they will connect the values of virtue and morality with leadership, thinking about the tough choices that Prince Hamlet must make throughout the play.

Grade 11 - Unit 2: American Dream Revisited; An Examination of Race, Modernism, and Mayhem
In unit 2, students examine nineteenth and twentieth century American literature, including Frederick Douglass’ narrative, the Harlem Renaissance, and “The Lost Generation.” They are also prompted to consider the notion of leadership through the lenses of race and personal responsibility. Through an exploration of the unit texts, students will contemplate questions like, “How do authors use rhetoric to address inequalities and injustices in early America?” and “Is the American Dream real?” They will also analyze the rhetoric of Douglass, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and other course readings to reflect on matters of race, agency, and the attainability of the American Dream.

DCPL Reading List

Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth by Richard Wright
Notes on A Native Son by James Baldwin
Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison
The Street by Ann Petry
The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright by Michael Fabre
Synopsis

Richard Wright’s iconic novel about oppression, freedom, and justice comes to life on stage in this groundbreaking adaptation. Suffocating in rat-infested poverty on the South Side of Chicago in the 1930s, 20-year-old Bigger Thomas struggles to find a place for himself in a world whose prejudice has shut him out. After taking a job in a wealthy white man’s house, Bigger unwittingly unleashes a series of events that violently and irrevocably seal his fate. Adapted with theatrical ingenuity by Chicago’s own Nambi E. Kelley, this Native Son captures the power of Richard Wright’s novel for a whole new generation.
Nambi E. Kelley (Playwright) Award winning actress/playwright, Kelley has performed across the country, including many shows at the Goodman Theatre & Steppenwolf Theatre, has been seen on several television shows, including Elementary, Person of Interest, Madam Secretary, Chicago PD, Chicago Justice, and has toured internationally. Most recently she appeared in MacArthur Genius Awardee Dominique Morisseau’s Pipeline in the lead role (City Theatre), the critically acclaimed Off Broadway two-hander production of Kunstler (59 E. 59) and Two Trains Running (Goodman Theatre). Kelley just made her directorial debut at TheatreWorks Colorado Springs, the first African-American female to helm a production in their over 40 year history. Also an accomplished playwright, Nambi is currently serving in residence at New Victory Theatre and is a fellow at The Dramatists Foundation in New York City. Kelley served as playwright in residence at the National Black Theatre in New York, was a recipient of the 2018-19 Writers Alliance Grants from the Dramatists Guild Foundation, a finalist for the Francesca Primus Award, The Kevin Spacey Foundation Award, and is working on an adaptation of Toni Morrison’s Jazz which is slated for several regional productions in coming seasons. Her adaptation of Native Son (Sam French) was the highest grossing production in Court Theatre’s 60 year history, has enjoyed productions across the country, most notably, at Yale Repertory Theatre, and will premiere in NYC in 2019. Nambi is working on several commissions, including commissions from Marin Theatre Company, Court Theatre, North Carolina Rep, American Blues Theater (proud ensemble member), and is also in development with several television and film projects. www.nambikelley.com

Psalmayene 24 (Director) Psalmayene 24 is an award-winning director, playwright, and actor. His directing credits include Word Becomes Flesh (Helen Hayes Award, Outstanding Direction, Play), The Shipment, Not Enuf Lifetimes, and Read: White and Blue. Psalm, as his colleagues call him, has received commissions from The African Continuum Theater Company, Arena Stage, Imagination Stage, Theater Alliance, The Kennedy Center, and Solas Nua. His play, The Frederick Douglass Project, co-written with Deirdre Kinahan, is nominated for six 2019 Helen Hayes Awards, including the Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding Original New Play or Musical. Psalm is the recipient of an Individual Artist Award in Playwriting from the Maryland State Arts Council and has received grants from the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities and the Boomerang Fund for Artists Inc. He received the 2014 Imagination Award from Imagination Stage (past recipients include Dr. Jane Goodall, Christopher Reeve, and Dennis Haysbert). As an actor, he has appeared on HBO’s critically acclaimed series The Wire, been nominated for a Helen Hayes award, and is a member of Actors’ Equity Association. Psalm is currently the Master Teaching Artist at Arena Stage and is the Artist-in-Residence at Bowie State University. Infinite love to Diana ...
# Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bigger Thomas</strong></td>
<td>Clayton Pelham Jr.</td>
<td>African-American male of 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hannah</strong></td>
<td>Lolita Horne</td>
<td>African-American female, early 40s, tough, broken, the edge of anger; plays a variety of roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mrs. Dalton</strong></td>
<td>Melissa Flaim</td>
<td>Caucasian female, late 40s to early 50s, blind and well-intentioned; plays a variety of roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jan</strong></td>
<td>Drew Kopas</td>
<td>Caucasian male, 30s, well-intentioned with an edge; plays a variety of roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black Rat</strong></td>
<td>Vaughn Ryan Midder</td>
<td>African-American male of 20s, the voice inside Bigger's head, the physical manifestation of Bigger's double consciousness, or how Bigger sees himself through the eyes of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buddy</strong></td>
<td>Tendo nsuguba</td>
<td>African-American male to play teens, soft, a follower; plays a variety of roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mary</strong></td>
<td>Madeleine Joey Rose</td>
<td>Caucasian female, early 20s, edgy and simultaneously precious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Britten</strong></td>
<td>Stephen Schmidt</td>
<td>Caucasian male, 40s-50s, main investigator, thrives of mischief; plays a variety of roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vera/Bessie</strong></td>
<td>Renee Elizabeth Wilson</td>
<td>African-American female to play teens to mid 20s, alcoholic, also plays a variety of roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Best selling author, social critic and influential literary figure, Richard Wright, was born on September 4, 1908 to Nathan Wright and Ella Wilson, both children of slaves, on a plantation near Roxie, Mississippi. His father was a sharecropper and his mother was a schoolteacher. Finding farm life unprofitable, the family moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where Wright encountered violence, racism and eventual poverty when his father abandoned the family.

After his mother fell ill in 1915, Wright and his brother were sent to an orphanage, then back to Mississippi to live with their grandparents. Wright felt isolated as a non-religious member of the strict Seventh Day Adventist household. He published his first short story, “The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre,” in 1924 in The Southern Register and held a series of jobs before moving to Chicago in 1927.

As part of the new black urban intelligentsia evolving in northern cities like Chicago and New York, Wright became a critic of the black urban experience and in 1932 joined the Communist Party. He was influenced by University of Chicago sociologists Robert Park and Horace Clayton, Jr., who portrayed black urban spaces as ghettoes mired in poverty. Like most migrants to the north, the life Wright experienced did not live up to his expectations. He began to see conflicts within the Communist philosophy, and eventually abandoned his affiliation. In 1937, he moved to New York City, where he won federal funding as a writer through the Works Progress Administration. Three years later he published his most successful fictional novel, Native Son (1940).

Native Son became an instant bestseller with more than 250,000 copies sold with in three weeks of its release. It was the first book by a black writer to be endorsed by the Book-of-the-Month Club, reaching an even wider audience. Native Son remains one of the most influential novels of the 20th Century. In Native Son, Wright uses the story of Bigger Thomas, a 20-year-old black migrant, to illustrate the poverty, hopelessness and alienation of the black residents in Chicago's South Side. His was the first of the genre of “ghetto realism” novels that remains popular today.

In addition to his early alignment with Communism, Wright went through several philosophical phases in his literary career, like his existential novel The Outsider (1953), and his anti-colonialist essays in White Man, Listen! (1957). Despite his major and often abrupt political and sociological shifts, he consistently promoted black culture and black protest that he saw emerging in urban life. His writings, including his acclaimed autobiographical Black Boy (1945), in many ways presaged the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1941, Wright married Ellen Poplar after an earlier failed marriage, and they had two daughters.

He moved his family to Paris in 1946, stating his reasons in a poem titled “I Choose Exile” (1950). In Paris, it seemed to Wright that for the first time in his life he could be both a writer and a black man.

Richard Wright was one of the first African American writers to achieve literary fame and fortune in the U.S. He died in Paris on November 28, 1960 as one of the most influential African-American writers of the 20th century.
01. **BLACK**  
BUDDY, A$AP FERG

02. **BROOKLYN**  
MOS DEF

03. **SUNSHINE**  
MOS DEF

04. **HIP-HOP**  
DEAD PREZ

05. **WELCOME TO THE TERRORDOME**  
PUBLIC ENEMY

06. **MEDITATE (FEAT. J.I.D)**  
EARTHGAND, JID

07. **EXHIBIT C**  
MOS DEF

08. **THE BLACKER THE BERRY**  
KENDRICK LAMAR

09. **BLOOD ON THE LEAVES**  
KANYE WEST

10. **POWER**  
RAPSODY, KENRICK LAMAR, LANCE SKIIIWALKER
11. **UNTITLED 07**  
   KENDRICK LAMAR

12. **NIGHTS**  
   FRANK OCEAN

13. **BIG FISH**  
   VINCE STAPLES

14. **REALLY DOE**  
   DANNY BROWN, KENDRICK LAMAR, AB-SOUL, EARL SWEATSHIRT

15. **SORE LOSER**  
   TIERRA WHACK

16. **THAT PART - BLACK HIPPY REMIX**  
   SCHOOLBOY Q

17. **WHO DAT BOY**  
   TYLER, THE CREATOR, A$AP ROCKY

18. **NO COMPLAINTS**  
   SYD

19. **SHABBA**  
   A$AP FERG, A$AP ROCKY

20. **NEVER RECOVER (LIL BABY & GUNNA, DRAKE)**  
   LIL BABY, GUNNA, DRAKE

21. **WE BALL**  
   ACE HOOD
Richard Wright's influential novel Native Son has enjoyed a rather fascinating life on stage and screen since its debut in March 1940. Soon after editor and critic Clifton Fadiman took to the pages of The New Yorker to herald the book as “the most powerful American novel to appear since The Grapes of Wrath,” Wright began working with Paul Green, a white southern dramatist, on a theatrical adaptation. The collaboration between the pair was notably fraught, with the two men frequently clashing over where to assign blame for the tragic downfall of the novel’s protagonist, Bigger Thomas. Nevertheless, on March 24, 1941, a year after Native Son became the first novel by a Black writer to be selected for the Book of the Month club, Wright and Green's stage version opened at the St. James Theatre on Broadway in a production directed by Orson Welles and co-produced by John Houseman. New York Times critic Brooks Atkinson called it “the biggest American drama of the season,” adding, “Mr. Green and Mr. Wright have translated a murder story into a portrait of racial fright and hatred and given it a conclusion that brings peace to a taut, bewildered mind.” It would mark the first of many forays into reanimating Wright’s searing exploration of the realities of race for stage and screen audiences. Subsequent adaptations would include: a 1951 Argentinian film titled Sangre negra, directed by Pierre Chenal and starring Wright as Bigger; a 1986 television movie directed by Jerrold Freedman and featuring Oprah Winfrey as Mrs. Thomas; a 2006 stage version adapted by director Kent Gash produced at Seattle’s Intiman Theatre; as well as, a forthcoming film version adapted by Suzan-Lori Parks.

Nambi E. Kelley’s Native Son, of course, fits within this ever-expanding genealogy. What marks her adaptation as distinctive, however, are the conversations it stages and activates about the interior lives of Black folk. Kelley notes that she imagined her script, in part, as a dialogue between Richard Wright and scholar-activist W. E. B. Du Bois regarding the effects of “double consciousness” on the Black psyche. First introduced in an essay he published in The Atlantic Monthly in 1897 titled, “Strivings of the Negro People,” and subsequently revised and further elaborated on in his groundbreaking essay collection, The Souls of Black Folk (1903), Du Bois wrote the following about his paradigm shifting concept:

[A] peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.
The ubiquity of anti-Blackness in the United States, Du Bois observed, was not without significant material and psychological consequences. Energizing his writing on double consciousness was a desire to see the structures preventing Black people from thriving and progressing upended.

Kelley’s adaptation sharpens focus on the internal conflicts and “warring ideals” that Du Bois attempted to capture with his enduring metaphor. To make explicit the sense of “twoness” that Du Bois contemplates and that Bigger struggles to negotiate, Kelley introduces a new character, The Black Rat, in her version. The figure, a personification of Bigger’s double consciousness, haunts the play, waiting for the unspoken, the unacknowledged to be released in time. “We all got two minds. How we see them seeing us. How we see our own self. But how they see you take over on the inside. And when you look in the mirror --You only see what they tell you you is. A Black rat sonofabitch,” he exclaims in the play’s opening beats. Beyond giving tangible form to Bigger’s inner thoughts and desires, The Black Rat reminds us of the grave dangers facing us all in the absence of a proper reckoning with the conundrum of race.

Noted philosopher and revolutionary Frantz Fanon proposes that Bigger acts in Native Son “to put an end to his tension.” The Black Rat suggests that the youth acts so that he might finally fly. There is a long tradition within Black expressive culture of mobilizing the trope of flight as a way to imagine and, indeed, engender new horizons and possibilities beyond the limitations imposed on Black life by a racist society. What is especially remarkable about Kelley’s rendering of Bigger is that, in the end, he becomes a fugitive from death. He flies. And, in so doing, he invites us to ponder what freedom means and, indeed, what it feels like.
An Interview with Nambi E. Kelley
By Khalid Y. Long and Isaiah M. Wooden

Who are the playwrights – past and present – that influence your work?

I have been deeply influenced by Goddess/Newest Ancestor Ntozake Shange. I believe my early plays were straight riffs on her voice as it was intersecting with my own. I used to really love Suzan-Lori Parks, her early stuff really ignited my creative spirit. Basically, any writers that were creating plays not set in a living room, I was all for! Plays set in living rooms also inspired me, just not as richly as the plays that were pushing the envelope as far as form, content, and theme.

In developing the adaptation, why was it important to create a character, The Black Rat, that would give voice and body to Bigger’s inner life?

The Black Rat is a manifestation of W.E.B. Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness. In my intention to give Bigger back to his own story, as opposed to what Richard Wright crafts, which is to present Bigger to white people as what they have created, I am attempting to show you who he is from the inside. Not a beast, but a boy caught in a circumstance beyond him that had he been in a different era or time, his intelligence and problem-solving skills would have made him a C.E.O.

Richard Wright was critiqued for his depiction of Black womanhood in Native Son (as well as his other works). Was this an area of concern for you in adapting the work?

Thank you for this question! I saw Richard Wright’s depiction of the women as a challenge to deepen the work on the adaptation. There are whole drafts that exist of my manuscript where the women have these huge monologues that take over the entire play! But my dramaturg let me know that I was writing a whole different script with those pieces, so I had to take the bare elements of them, pair them down, and use the essentials to carve out real ladies.

Why do you think contemporary audiences continue to connect so deeply with Wright’s novel?

What I can speak more directly to is my work on the adaptation, which has vastly different intentions from what Wright was creating. His work was to depict Bigger the animal or beast. My work is to depict Bigger the boy. My play is a conversation between Richard Wright and W.E.B. Du Bois about the effects of double consciousness on the Black psyche. I have crafted the character of The Black Rat to speak to how Bigger sees himself through the eyes of whites, yet because ultimately a doubled consciousness is designed for our survival, The Black Rat is not the devil on Bigger’s shoulder, but the survival instinct in him that fights to save his life. As it functions in my play, what is meant for someone’s harm turns out to be their salvation.
Timeline of Black Chicago

1919 On July 27, 1919, an African-American teenager, Eugene Williams drowned in Lake Michigan after violating the unofficial segregation of Chicago’s beaches and being stoned by a group of white youths. His death, and the police’s refusal to arrest the white man whom eyewitnesses identified as causing it, sparked a week of rioting between gangs of black and white Chicagoans, concentrated on the South Side neighborhood surrounding the stockyards. When the riots ended on August 3, 15 whites and 23 blacks had been killed and more than 500 people injured; an additional 1,000 black families had lost their homes when they were torched by rioters.

1920 182,274 African-Americans are residing in Illinois per the 1920 Federal Census. Violette N. Anderson is the first black woman to be admitted to the Illinois Bar.

1922 Anthony Overton establishes the Douglass National Bank and the Chicago Bee newspaper. The Overton Hygenic Building, which houses Overton’s thriving cosmetics and health products business, becomes an “anchor” in Chicago’s Black Metropolis in 1923. The Chicago Bee provides “healthy competition” to Abbott’s Chicago Defender. The Overton Hygenic Building is placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

1924 Albert B. George of Chicago is elected to the municipal court bench, the first elected black judge in Illinois. Adelbert H. Roberts of Chicago, who serves three terms in the Illinois House of Representatives, is the first black elected to the Illinois State Senate. A commemorative statue to his General Assembly Service stands in the Capitol rotunda.

Fannie Barrier Williams (1855-1944), lecturer, civic leader, clubwoman, and journalist, becomes the first black and the first woman to serve on the Library Board of Chicago.

Vivian Gordon Harsh (1890-1960) becomes the first black librarian at the Chicago Public Library (CPL). As the first head librarian at the George Cleveland Hall branch library on Chicago’s south side, she begins the “Special Negro Collection,” a small but significant 30 collection of books on black history and literature. In 1970, CPL renamed the collection in her honor; in 1975 the Vivian G. Harsh Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, which exceeded 70,000 volumes, was moved to the newly constructed Carter G. Woodson Regional Library.

1927 Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater signs with the Chicago Cardinals football team (1927-1931); he plays while attending law school. Slater, born in Normal, later serves as Chicago Municipal Court Judge in 1966.

1929 Oscar DePriest of Chicago is seated in the United States House of Representatives, becoming Illinois’ first black congressman from the North. (Negro congressmen had represented the South during the era of Reconstruction.)

1931 Katherine Dunham and her Chicago Negro School of Ballet troupe perform at the Chicago Beaux Arts Ball. An anthropologist, choreographer, teacher, and social activist, Dunham transforms modern dance by the infusion of elements of African and Caribbean folk culture and rhythms.

1933 The Illinois General Assembly passes a law which forbids racial discrimination on state contracts for public works and buildings.

1934 Arthur W. Mitchell of Chicago is elected to the United States House of Representatives, the first Democratic African-American congressman in the United States.

1939 Chicago author Richard Wright (1908-1960) publishes Native Son; Wright’s name is one of thirty-five Illinois authors named on the frieze of the Illinois State Library, Springfield.

1941 The Illinois General Assembly passes a law which forbids racial discrimination in all defense contracts in the state.

Ellsworth Dansby of Decatur, one of the “Tuskegee Airmen,” becomes the first African-American master sergeant in the first black fighter squadron—the 99th Fighter Squadron—during World War II. Dansby later serves on the Decatur Board of Education and Board of Directors of the Decatur/Macon County Opportunities Corporation; he dies in 1989.
1942 John H. Johnson publishes the Negro Digest, the first periodical devoted to reprinting and featuring articles of special interest and importance to the black community. The magazine paves the way for the Chicago-based Johnson Publishing Company’s successes with such magazines as Ebony and Jet.

1943 Muddy Waters, famed blues musician, moves to Chicago from Mississippi.

An order of Governor Dwight H. Green establishes the Illinois Inter-racial Commission, an advisory committee charge to investigate every phase of a difficult problem—housing, employment, education, etc.—to prevent disturbances in our state...and to promote mutual understanding among our people.

The Chicago Mayor’s Commission on Race Relations, known after 1945 as the Commission on Human Relations becomes the first such municipal commission in the United States.

1945 The Chicago City Council passes an ordinance which forbids discrimination in employment in Chicago.


1950 Gwendolyn Brooks (1917) becomes the first black woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for Annie Allen, a volume of poems. Upon the death of Carl Sandburg in 1968, Brooks is named Illinois Poet Laureate by Governor Otto Kerner. She is one of the thirty-five Illinois authors named on the frieze of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

Themes

Double Consciousness
Systematic/Institutional Racism
Classism

Activities After the Play

SCENE STUDY

In this scene, of Native Son, we see Bigger and his younger brother Buddy, playing pool at a local pool hall. They talk of their dreams, Bigger’s to fly a plane and Buddy’s to find just where he fits in. The Black Rat, of course, always just within earshot.
SCENE THREE

With Buddy

(They shoot pool. THE BLACK RAT shoots at a nearby table as he listens.)

BIGGER: They so alive. White boys sure can fly.

(BIGGER juts out his arms like a child and “flies” around the room.)

Control tower, requesting clearance for landing! Over!

BUDDY: This is control tower. Land your fool ass down at that pool table. Over.

BIGGER: Goddamn you, Buddy. I could, you know. I could fly.

THE BLACK RAT: Yeah. If you wasn’t black and if you had some money and if they’d let you go to that aviation school, you could fly a plane.

BUDDY: Too damn early in the day to dream.

BIGGER: Don’t you want nothing? Solid, side pocket.

BUDDY: Your shoot.

BIGGER: Done settled enough fights ’tween our folks…you could learn to be a Negro judge! Striped, corner.

BUDDY: That’s dumb.

BIGGER: Not dumb. You also got a knack for numbers, you could –

BUDDY: Run numbers.

BIGGER: Naw. Something better.

BUDDY: Something better? Yeah, right. Say, you going over to the Dalton’s later for that chauffeur job?

THE BLACK RAT: I gonna be driving a Cadillac! Or a Dusseldorf!

BIGGER: Yeah, I guess.

BUDDY: “Yeah, I guess”? Now you really dumb!

BIGGER: Buddy –?!

BUDDY: What?

THE BLACK RAT: Easy...

BIGGER: Your shot..

BUDDY: You talk like you don’t want that chauffeur job.

BIGGER: I want it, just seem like –

(BIGGER looks at the sky. Watches the plane vanish.)

BIGGER: They own the world.
Questions:

1. Describe the relationship between Bigger and Buddy. How did you and your scene partner express that relationship through vocal tone, body language, etc.?

2. What is the role of The Black Rat in this scene? What vibe does he give off? How did you express that through your portrayal?

3. With The Black Rat, what is the significance of this character being present but not saying many lines? What does that tell you about the character?

4. What does Bigger want in this scene and what are they feeling?

5. What does Buddy want in this scene and what are they feeling?

6. What is the flow of the scene? Where does the scene pick up and slow down? Why?

7. Discuss the difference of the length of the lines for each character. Why do you think some characters speak more than others?

8. What can you and your scene partners change or add to make the scene more believable and dynamic?

MONOLOGUE STUDY

In this monologue, we see Bigger battling himself coming to terms with his fate, warranted or not. He speaks of they and how what they do forces him to be something he isn't and something he never wanted to become.

BIGGER: It’s what they do! Choke you off the face of the earth! Don’t even let you feel what you want to feel. After you so hot and hard you only feel what they doing to you. They like God! Kill you before you die. Ain’t a man no more, don’t know what I doin’! I mean, I know what I’m doing. But I can’t help nothin’. Like somebody step in my skin, start acting for me. Like my mind ain’t my mind, like...my body is their body...say... do...be...whatever they say I do...be... I... I... I killed cause...that white lady...she...was killing me! Killing me – Kill – Me. I didn’t mean to... Ain’t the rat ’neath the bed! Ain’t the rat I killed! Now I see. After I killed that white lady, ain’t no sense being scared no more. I was free. Free. Free.

(It is the first time in his life he has shared his deepest thoughts with himself, been in the moment with his own humanity. His mind quiets.)

Questions:

1. Describe how Bigger is feeling during this monologue. How did you express those emotions through vocal tone, body language, etc.?

2. What does he want in this monologue? What is his intention for saying this?

3. Does he get what he wants with this particular piece?

4. What can you change or add to your performance to make this monologue more believable and dynamic?
Undoubtedly, Chicago remains one of the most segregated cities in the United States. However, segregation did not halt the development of a vibrant and affluent African American community. The list of names to emerge from Chicago's rolodex is quite extensive and provides only a glimpse into Chicago's rich Black history with ties to the city's political, cultural, artistic, and economic heritage. The history of Black Chicago dates to its founding father, Jean Baptiste Point DuSable (1745-1818), a Haitian fur trader who set up camp at the southern tip of Lake Michigan around 1779. Other noted figures who shaped Chicago's Black cultural presence include Oscar DePriest (1871-1951); first black congressman after Reconstruction; Ebony and Jet magazines tycoon John H. Johnson (1918-2005); Carol Moseley Braun (1971), America's first black woman senator; singer and entertainer Chaka Khan (1953); and literary giants such as playwright Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965), poet Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000), and novelist Richard Wright (1908-1960).
W. E. B. Du Bois first explored the concept of double consciousness in his 1903 publication, “The Souls of Black Folk”. It is described as the “individual sensation of feeling as though your identity is divided into several parts, making it difficult or impossible to have one unified identity.” Du Bois spoke on this within the context of race relations in the United States. He stated that because American blacks have lived in a society that has historically repressed and devalued them, that it has become difficult for them to unify their black identity with their American identity. Due to this difficulty in unifying identities, double consciousness forces blacks to not only view themselves from their own unique perspective, but to also view themselves as they might be perceived by the outside “white” world.

As a result, blacks can suffer from a damaged self-image shaped by the perceptions and treatment of white people. Black life in turn can easily become shaped by stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream culture.

With this, think of ways in today’s society that people of color have been shaped by these stereotypes. Make a list of how you see people of color portrayed. Then, create a list of how you’d wish the media would represent people of color.
