

Shine

A story about believing in yourself

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Teacher and Student Resource Guide

FULL CIRCLE THEATRE: TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCE GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Full Circle Theatre is an educational drama program for students at the Washington School for Girls (WSG). Our mission is to provide WSG students with comprehensive theater education and unique, on-stage experiences. We seek to engage students in original stories and productions that inspire, entertain, and challenge both performers and audiences. We hope that this *Full Circle Theatre: Teacher and Student Resource Guide* will help you and your students get the most out of our production of *Shine: A story about believing in yourself*.

Shine offers many thematic and cross-curricular learning opportunities for students in areas related to:

- ❖ Black History;
- ❖ Women's History;
- ❖ the creative process in the arts and sciences;
- ❖ the importance of friendship and community; and
- ❖ learning to believe in yourself in the face of adversity.

This guide provides background information and activities to help students understand the themes and dramatic narrative of the play. It also contains material about the creative team behind *Shine* and the process of developing this production. We encourage you to use this resource guide to explore the play's concepts with your students before and after the performance.

Enjoy the show!

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SYNOPSIS OF *SHINE*

Ariel, a 16-year-old sophomore in high school, and her best friends Jaquenetta and Selene are on their way to school on a beautiful fall day. Ariel expresses her excitement about another day at school because she is a straight A student, while Jaquenetta and Selene say they hate school. However, in English class, Ariel is having a hard time with her new teacher, Ms. Boyet, who gives her a C minus on her first writing assignment. The bad grade causes Ariel to faint and her friends take her to see her former English teacher and mentor, Ms. Rhonda. Ms. Rhonda advises Ariel not to give up and work harder to earn an A. Ariel returns home after school to begin working on her next writing assignment. With the help of Jaquenetta, Selene, and her mother, Marlana, Ariel finishes her writing assignment and turns it in to Ms. Boyet, who promptly gives her a B minus. Ariel is depressed over her grade again and finds out from her annoying classmate and arch rival, Brandi, about an essay contest. Brandi does not think Ariel is good enough to enter, but Jaquenetta and Selene argue otherwise when they find out that the top prize is \$500 and publication in Rookie Magazine. Ariel is finally convinced to participate in the contest when Ms. Boyet assures her that winning the contest will earn her an A.

Several weeks later, Ariel is still struggling to write her essay and concludes that her writing lacks passion. After discussing the problem with Ms. Rhonda, Ariel decides to talk to her friends about their passions. She is surprised to learn that Jaquenetta is an aspiring pianist and aerospace engineer and is keeping her talents a secret to maintain her reputation for being tough and uncaring. While Selene's passion for dancing is well known, Ariel is impressed by her drive to become a famous tap dancer with a sphere of influence as big as Beyonce. Inspired by her friends but uncertain about her own talents as a writer, Ariel seeks comfort from her mother. Marlana believes that Ariel is working hard but that her motivations are wrong. She tells her daughter to look inside herself to find out what really matters to her, and Ariel realizes what she needs to write a winning essay. At school, a special assembly is called to recognize the winner of the essay contest. During the assembly Jaquenetta and Selene have a heart-to-heart about their dreams for the future, and Ariel reads her essay to the applause of her classmates.

CHARACTERS

ARIEL, 16 year-old aspiring writer

JAQUENETTA, one of Ariel's best friends and an aspiring engineer and pianist

SELENE, one of Ariel's best friends and an aspiring dancer

BRANDI, Ariel's arch rival

MS. BOYET, Ariel's new English teacher

MS. RHONDA, Ariel's mentor and former English teacher

MARLENA, Ariel's mother

PRODUCTION TEAM

Co-directors Leah Nelson and Risa Garza started the Full Circle Theatre program in 2014 to share their love of theater with students at the Washington School for Girls (WSG). Mrs. Nelson is a choreographer with nearly twenty years of combined experience performing and teaching dance. She is trained in hip hop, jazz, and ballet and uses her expertise in creative movement to choreograph original dance numbers for Full Circle productions. Ms. Garza has worked in both musical and children's theater productions and has written and produced eight stage plays. She uses her experience in both theater and youth development to create original productions that are designed to educate students about the arts, history, and culture.

PRODUCTION BACKGROUND & DEVELOPMENT

Every year the Washington School for Girls (WSG) produces a talent and variety showcase to celebrate Black History Month. This year, school administrators decided to turn the showcase into the school's first full scale production with the help of the Full Circle Theatre creative team. *Shine: A story about believing in yourself* was inspired by WSG's mission to graduate young women of compassion, competence, and leadership. The narrative of the play centers on the aspirations of a new generation of young women who are eager to make their mark on history by building on the achievements of those who have come before them. At its heart, *Shine* is about friendship and overcoming adversity to realize your dreams.

The Full Circle team started meeting to develop *Shine* in the spring of 2016. Discussions focused on how to incorporate black history into the story, while keeping the narrative fully in the present. In addition, the team wanted the main characters to represent a future version of WSG students that is still close enough for them to relate to the characters. From these conversations, Ariel, an angst-ridden but optimistic 16-year-old, and her wise-cracking friends were born. Weeklong auditions for the cast and dance ensemble were held in September, and twice weekly rehearsals began that same month.

As a nod to the diverse interests and talents of the students at WSG, *Shine* features singing, dancing, and acting in a jukebox musical format. The show's all-female cast is made up of WSG middle school students in grades 6-8. Nearly all costumes, props, and set design pieces were either created, donated, or borrowed from WSG and WSG students. Tap shoes were provided through the generosity of members of the Junior League of Washington, which supports the literacy program at WSG. Lighting and sound design for the show was created in collaboration with THEARC Theater, which provides facility rentals and tech for all WSG and Full Circle productions. *Shine* is a featured production of the *THEARC Theater presents...Black History Month* series.

MAJOR THEMES & CONCEPTS

Black History & Women's History

While *Shine* is set in the present day, Black History and Women's History are essential to the storyline and are integrated into several elements of the production including the dialogue, music, costumes, and props. The purpose of this integration is twofold: 1) it provides the students in the play with opportunities to learn about key figures in history; and 2) it celebrates how historical achievements shape the present and future. For example, most of the songs featured in *Shine* are by black female artists. Ariel's friend Jaquenetta discusses the life of Nina Simone as one of her inspirations and also mentions Alicia Keys as a role model. Both women have made significant contributions to hip hop music as classically trained pianists, and their achievements are the foundation for Jaquenetta's own aspirations.

Friendship & Community

It is the support of her community that allows Ariel to persevere and ultimately achieve her goals. Throughout the play, Ariel seeks support from her friends, family, and mentor, who help her regain her confidence and find her voice as a writer. Ariel relies on Jaquenetta and Selene to keep her motivated, on her mentor Ms. Rhonda to keep her focused, and on her mother to keep her grounded. The friendship of the three teenage girls, in particular, is the source of *Shine's* heart. Although Ariel, Jaquenetta, and Selene often make fun of each other, their actions continually demonstrate their love for one another. Jaquenetta and Selene are constantly helping Ariel by reassuring and encouraging her and directly supporting her essay-writing efforts. While Ariel spends most of the play preoccupied with her own problems, she finally expresses her admiration and gratitude for her friends after learning about their hopes and dreams.

Creativity & Individualism

Ariel and her friends all have different talents and personalities, but they share a desire to create something new and to express themselves as individuals. Their drive to innovate in their chosen fields is fueled by their appreciation and admiration for the innovators who have come before them. Jaquenetta and Selene view their dreams as extensions of the achievements of their predecessors, who have made it possible for them to pursue their goals. They recognize that whatever they accomplish, they do it standing on the shoulders of men and women who blazed the trail. Ariel strives to make a similar connection between herself and the writers that she admires, but only after developing a better understanding of the creative process does she realize her own identity and role as a writer.

Importance of Hard Work

On the surface, the main conflict in *Shine* arises when Ariel's new English teacher, Ms. Boyet, gives the budding writer a bad grade. However, it becomes clear that Ariel's struggle to find her voice and believe in herself enough to keep writing is what drives the plot forward. Before taking Ms. Boyet's class, Ariel's natural writing talent helped her excel in school. But when she is asked to take her writing to the next level, she realizes that she must work harder to reach her full potential.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Pre-Show

1. Despite the adage, it is sometimes helpful to judge a book by its cover. Discuss the image on the cover of this resource guide. What do the choices in color and typography say about the play? What do you think the play might be about?
2. Similar to a jukebox musical, *Shine* uses previously released popular music to enhance the action on stage. Discuss the role of music and song in plays and films. How can music be used to create mood and setting? How does music influence your experience of a play or film?
3. Friendship and mentorship are major elements in *Shine's* plot. Ask students to think about how their friends support and inspire them. What makes a good friend? Why is friendship so important? Discuss the role of a mentor. How is a mentor different than a parent or a friend? What makes a good mentor? Who are some people that you consider mentors?
4. One lesson that can be learned from *Shine* is that without hard work and discipline, natural talent will only get you so far. Ask students to think about a time when they had to work hard to achieve a goal. How does learning and practice make you smarter or better at a skill?
5. On stage, good storytelling is persuasive storytelling. Discuss the ways in which plays, movies or television shows convince the audience to suspend their disbelief. What production elements contribute to realism within the world of a play?

Post-Show

1. Discuss the major themes in *Shine*. What did you learn about Black History and Women's History? How did Ariel, Jaquenetta, and Selene demonstrate their friendship? How did different characters express their individuality? In what ways did Ariel change or grow by the end of the play?
2. Throughout the play, Ariel expresses self-doubt and confusion about who she is. Why do you think her bad grade made her feel that way? How did her friends and family help her overcome her doubt? Have you ever felt like Ariel? Why?
3. In theater, language provides clues to a story's setting. Foreign language and slang are both used in *Shine* to create authenticity of time, place, and culture. How does Selene's use of Spanish affect your perception of her? What about her use of 90s slang? Were there slang words or phrases that you did not recognize? Discuss how slang changes over time. Why do you think new slang words are created?
4. How do the music and choreography in *Shine* move the action forward? Why do you think the playwright chose to use existing popular music instead of creating new songs? What role does the singing and dancing play in Ariel's character development? Which musical numbers were most effective at storytelling? Which ones were the most entertaining?

5. Ariel, Jaquenetta, and Selene represent a generation of young women who are self-confident, driven, and not limited by sexism and stereotypes of older generations. Do you agree with this characterization of Generation Z (ages 7-21)? Do you think Ariel, Jaquenetta, and Selene are realistic characters?
6. Jaquenetta is the most outspoken character in *Shine*. Why do you think she hides her interests in science and music from her friends? How does the revelation of her secret affect her relationship with Ariel and Selene?
7. Being bullied in school is a problem for many children and teenagers. Do you think that Ariel and her friends treat their classmate Brandi fairly? Is Brandi a bully toward Ariel? How could the girls change their behavior to build a culture of kindness at their school?
8. In what ways do Black History and Women's History affect the characters? Are you inspired by historical figures? Do you feel that history influences your career goals? How?
9. Over the course of the play, Ms. Rhonda and Marlana prove to be important role models for Ariel. How is Ariel's relationship with her mother (Marlena) different than her relationship with Ms. Rhonda? Discuss the different ways that Ms. Rhonda and Marlana help Ariel define herself as a writer. Marlana tells Ariel that being a great writer is not the same as wanting other people to think you are a great writer. Is being motivated by recognition or fame a bad thing? How is it different than being motivated by a desire for self-improvement?
10. When Ariel reads her winning essay at the end of *Shine*, she describes her peers as "both radical and conservative." What does she mean by that? In the context of her essay, what is being changed and what is being preserved? Do you agree that any innovations or inventions are built on past achievements? Why?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Due to budget constraints, *Shine* has minimal production values. However, set design and technical theater elements do not have to be flashy or very detailed to effectively portray a story. Discuss some ways a director could use a single production element like lighting to effectively illustrate the setting for a scene. In small groups, ask students to create a minimalist set design using found objects in the classroom.
2. In *Shine*, Ariel, who has always defined herself as a good student and writer, suffers a major identity crisis when she receives her first bad grade in school. Give students the creative writing prompt: “who are you?” What defines them as individuals? How do their passions, goals, and aspirations influence their personalities and behaviors? What makes them unique?
3. Have students imagine a play about themselves. What is the name of the play and what is the play about? What conflicts do they have to overcome and how do they overcome it? Would the play feature their families or friends? Where does the play take place? Ask them to design a theater poster for the play.
4. A tableaux is a group of motionless figures representing a scene from a story or history which is comprised of living actors. (In popular culture, tableaux can be found in the trending mannequin challenge.) Ask students to create a tableaux of an event or achievement in Black History. What emotions are depicted in the tableaux? How does participating in the tableaux affect their understanding or perception of the event or achievement? Discuss how historical events shape the present and future? In what ways are students directly impacted by history in their daily lives and in their plans for the future?
5. *Shine* was written to educate and entertain the students and families at the Washington School for Girls. Have students re-write a well-known story or play for a specific audience. Discuss how to adapt story elements to appeal to the audience. Consider the age of the audience and purpose of the story.
6. Ask students to draw on their personal experience to develop an original scene or write a character monologue about an internal conflict or struggle. After performing the scene or monologue, have students critique each other’s work. Were the characters vivid and complex? Was the dramatic conflict engaging? What playwriting tools were used in the performance (e.g. storytelling, jokes, improvisation, nonverbal expressions)?
7. Have students musicalize a story either by using popular songs or by creating new ones. What do the songs reveal about the plot, setting, or characters?
8. In a different time period, the characters in *Shine* would potentially face barriers in pursuing their dreams. Discuss how the play would be different if it were set prior to the 1950s. How would the absence of later historical events and achievements affect the characters’ goals and career plans? Have students work in groups to write new descriptions for each of the three main characters. In what ways are the characters different or the same?

THEATER ETIQUETTE

The phrase “theatre etiquette” refers to the special rules of behavior that are called for when attending a theatre performance. Above all, it is important to remember that the actors on stage can see and hear you at the same time you can see and hear them.

General Guidelines

Be respectful of the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and courteous:

- ❖ Please help turn off your cell phone and other electronic devices (iPods, games, etc.). It can be very distracting, not to mention embarrassing, when a cell phone goes off during a performance. The lights from cell phones and other electronic devices are also a big distraction, so please no text messaging.
- ❖ Before entering the theatre, please leave all food and drinks in the lobby.
- ❖ Please visit the restroom before the performance begins so you don’t miss out on any of the action on stage.
- ❖ Please feel free to laugh, applaud, and enjoy the performance. However, please don’t talk during the show. Talking is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors. Save discussions for intermission and after the performance.

A Note from Full Circle Theatre

Our program at the Washington School for Girls is a fledgling endeavor. *Shine* is our first full-scale production; it was created and produced by a team of two with limited time and a non-existent budget. Our students have worked hard over the last few months but they have only had four hours of rehearsal each week, which is not enough time to produce a polished performance. While our program is more about educating our students than staging professional productions, experience performing in front of an audience is essential to theater education, and we want that experience to be positive. We are continuing to improve the program and acquire the resources we need to fulfill our mission.

In the meantime, we are beyond proud of our students for their achievements and are grateful for their patience as we take this journey together. We ask that you are mindful of the fact that this production is a learning experience for everyone involved. We are committed to staging the best possible production for our audience, but we do not expect a perfect performance. If our students hit a bump or two during the show, please be patient and kind. Help us encourage and motivate them to continue learning by ensuring that they have a fun and positive experience on stage.