Blackeyed: Plays and Monologues
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“Suggestions for Classroom Use”

What follows are some writing prompts, discuss questions and activities. The plays and monologues in this collection reflect culturally specific elements of the Black experience in the United States as well as the universality of the human condition. Writings include poetic language and are designed to investigate Black culture drawing from personal and ancestral experience and informal and formal research. The following suggestions were selected based upon things I’ve used in the classroom to help students further engage creative readings and what they teach about social issues relevant to a specific course.

Select Disciplines (Suggestions may be applied to other disciplines including Sociology, Performance, Communication and Gender Studies):

Playwrighting/Creative Writing – Note and discuss the use of African American English/Black Dialect, figurative or poetic language including simile, metaphor, and imagery, and the effect of setting each piece in urban and often inner city environments. Compare and contrast the difference between plot and character driven plays in which plot develops out of character interactions.

African/Africana/Black Studies – All of the work in this collection is specific to the Black experience and addresses institutional, internalized, intraethnic and interethnic racism as well as sexism, homophobia, classism and other social issues. Bring plays and monologues to life for the class by planning ‘Readers Theatre’ sessions asking for volunteers to play the various roles as well as a narrator to read the stage directions. Suggested plays: 1) Hats, 6 Black men in an inner-city pool hall solve a mysterious death and discover God. Plays include the oral history of the origin of 9-Ball as well as emphasizing the importance of community and Black culture. 2) MEAT, in part based on formal research, this play explores the mind of serial killer Anthony Sowell who murdered 11 Black women in an inner-city Cleveland, Ohio neighborhood 3) Purses, a sharp contrast to MEAT this play explores the intergenerational relationships between three Black women and ways they support each other while revealing parts of their lives represented by objects they carry in their purses. As each shares their stories, personal experiences which include domestic violence, alcoholism, and abortion, the audience discovers the importance of women supporting other women and the power of forgiveness and redemption.

Education – The plays and monologues represent creative renderings of the Black experience and would be useful for in-class discussions, further research and critical reflection. Select pieces could be used to complement course subject and readings. Particularly useful for Multicultural, Intercultural, Diversity courses.

Plays: Brief Description

1. Hats, 6 Black men – History of Black contributions to pool, importance of collective of Black men to community, male-female relationships.
2. Purses, 3 Black women – Role of intergenerational Black women in supporting each other including the importance of open, honest conversation about the trials and tribulations of their lives.
3. Dirt, 1 Black woman – One Black woman’s journey from childhood to discovering the rich, soil of her soul.
4. Closure, Ensemble of 4-5 actors – Choreopoem. Story of the foreclosure crisis is told from the perspective of the objects left behind in the homes.
5. *Sadie Stories*, 2 Black women – Homelessness, synesthesia and adultery are experienced in the body of an empath who is touched by lives of each of the three women in this play.

6. *Numbers* – 2 Black women, 1 Black man – Three dead people buried in a cemetery on what used to be the grounds of an insane asylum, come back to tell how and why each of them were committed to the asylum, what life was like during their stay and how they died.

7. *MEAT* – A chorus of Black women guide the audience through the mind of Tone, accused murderer of eleven Black women on Imperial Avenue, in an inner-city Cleveland neighborhood.

**Monologues (Selected List)**

- Beauty Secret – Breast Cancer
- Love Note – Mental Illness
- Barefoot – LGBTQ (Lesbian)
- Locker – LGBTQ (Gay)
- Backfire – Police violence against Black males
- Acknowledgement – Incest
- Lights Up – Suicide (Man)
- Train Stop – Suicide (Woman)

**Other Suggestions:**

- Reader’s Theatre: Assign student cast and narrator, read play seated in a circle. Discuss difference between reading aloud on the page and sharing work out loud.
- Improvisation: Take main point/theme of one scene and act it out without a script. Revisit script. Discuss what you learn from improvising theater in the moment.
- Change one Thing: In small groups let each group change one key thing about play. Discuss how altering one key action, line of dialogue, character, affects what happens in the work.
- Lived Experience Connect: Ask each student if something reminds them of a personal experience. Ask for volunteers to share. Link what’s shared back to what happens in the play and discuss whether or not this exercise leads to deeper engagement with the piece.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

1. How is the plot of the play driven by the characters?
2. Compare and contrast the roles of the women in *Purses* and *MEAT*.
3. Various kinds of racism are referenced in several of the plays. Identify each type and note how it impacts what happens to the main characters.
4. How does the place each play is set affect its climax?
5. What can be learned about the Black experience in the U.S. from each play?