



# THE COLOR PURPLE at HOME

THE MUSICAL

A cluster of purple and yellow flowers is positioned to the right of the title. Below the flowers is a circular badge with the text "MADE BY CURVE" in a stylized font.

BASED UPON THE NOVEL WRITTEN BY ALICE WALKER AND THE WARNER BROS./AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT MOTION PICTURE

BOOK BY MARSHA NORMAN

MUSIC & LYRICS BY BRENDA RUSSELL, ALLEE WILLIS & STEPHEN BRAY

# LEARNING PACK

For those aged 14+

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# INTRODUCTION

A very warm welcome to this learning pack, which accompanies our streamed performance of **Marsha Norman, Brenda Russell, Alleé Willis & Stephen Bray's** Tony-award winning musical *The Color Purple*.

It is a huge thrill for all of us at Curve, in association with our friends at **Birmingham Hippodrome**, to present this great musical for audiences to enjoy at home. After the unprecedented events of the past year, the musical's message of solidarity, unity and accepting who you truly are, has never felt more important or relevant. The Civil Rights Movement and rights of LGBT+ people have been intertwined over many decades of persecution and struggle; the character of Celie represents many of these struggles and **Alice Walker's** novel celebrates the progress made, whilst exposing battles still to be won. We are proud these voices collide in this extraordinary musical and the memories of people who have fought injustice, people of colour and LGBT folk, are all celebrated so vividly in this story.

We have developed this resource pack with the same inside out, accessible ethos that Curve is built on. We hope the information will offer a practical understanding of how we make our productions and the skills and techniques designers, actors, directors, composers and production teams use when creating a production.

There are sections we hope will aid your exploration, enjoyment and understanding of the musical, such as character breakdowns, a synopsis of the story, a timeline of real events from the period the musical is set, and contextual information about the themes in the story. These things were all incredibly helpful in rehearsals, especially as our understanding of the complexity of the characters deepened. We hope you enjoy the fly-on-the-wall video, classroom activity ideas and photographs to support your understanding of our process.

As you know, things are changing rapidly at the moment, so we will be releasing dates for pre-show talks with the writers, director and actors over the coming weeks, in addition to creative interactive activities inspired by *The Color Purple*, that you can get involved with. Please check our website [www.curveonline.co.uk](http://www.curveonline.co.uk) and social media channels for more information.

No production of *The Color Purple* could happen without a blazing star at its centre. In Alice Walker's original novel and this musical, the actress playing Celie has inevitably provided the heartbeat and soul of the production. We are blessed **T'Shan Williams** once again plays this iconic role and makes it her own with such a beautiful performance. As you will see, it is an astonishing performance and all of us at Curve are proud to see such beautiful work happening on our stage and in our city. Alongside T'Shan are a company of astonishing actors – dazzling talent – and it is a pleasure to welcome the entire cast, crew and musicians back to Leicester and marvel at their truly world-class work. And a warm welcome to **Carly Mercedes Dyer**, who takes on the role of Shug Avery in this concert staging.

We first saw **Tinuke Craig's** work at Chichester Festival Theatre, where Tinu directed acclaimed productions of **debbie tucker green's** plays *random and generations*. The productions were directed with such searing intelligence, imagination and sensitivity, that it meant Tinuke was the only choice to work on this major revival of *The Color Purple* in 2019, which went on to win the WhatsOnStage Award for Best Regional Production. We are sure you will agree, Tinuke and her team have done great work and created a piece all of us in the Midlands can be proud of.

Alongside Tinuke, we are pleased choreographer **Mark Smith**, whose work we first encountered with his dance company **Deaf Men Dancing**, returns to Curve. And **Alex Parker** did incredible work for our 10th Anniversary celebrations and it is wonderful to see him back in Leicester, again holding the musical baton for this astonishing score, magnificently orchestrated by **Martin Higgins**. In 2019 **Alex Lowde** created a world to perfectly frame this fast-changing story and in this streamed version, Alex once again brings early 20th century Southern America to our stage through his beautifully detailed costumes. All of this is complemented and framed superbly by Curve Associate **Ben Cracknell's** lighting. As you know, sound design is so important in the theatre, but especially with musicals. You will recognise **Tom Marshall's** name from many hit Made at Curve productions. Tom has the finest ears in the business and is always a joy to work with; we are thrilled he's back with us at Curve, working his sound magic on the mixing desk.

A large-scale production like this cannot happen without partners and in addition to the incredible creative talents of those mentioned above, we are pleased to be working in association with our friend **Fiona Allan** and her Birmingham Hippodrome team on this production. We are also thrilled to have the support of **Andrea Gray** and her **PPL PRS** team and **Sarah Thompson** and her colleagues at **De Montfort University**, whose sponsorship enables us to offer free tickets to stream this show to local community groups and young people. Our thanks also go to **Steve Spiegel** and his team at **Theatrical Rights Worldwide, Arts Council England, Leicester City Council** and the **DCMS' Culture Recovery Fund**.

Our final thanks go to all our **NHS** staff members who have worked tirelessly and selflessly for all of us over the last year. We are pleased to offer 2,000 free tickets to NHS workers and sincerely hope this production can provide some much-needed escapism at this time.

Enjoy the show and share its songs of freedom and equality in your communities, wherever you are.

**Chris Stafford** Chief Executive  
**Nikolai Foster** Artistic Director





# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

It's a strange thing coming back to a show. The assumption when one makes theatre is almost always that the last day is the last day, and that the thing you created has gone, vanished almost as quickly as it came about, and on you go to the next project hopefully with some good memories and the sense that you did some good and gave the audiences something. But every now and then, you get a chance to revisit and reanimate your show, and in doing so you get to transport yourself back to a past-self, a past-community, a past-time.

That's a particularly weird thing to do when your past-self, past-community and past-time existed before a global pandemic changed the world and decimated your industry. Reuniting *The Color Purple* team was like escaping to a pre-2020 existence (albeit one with masks and social distancing). It was really exciting to be back with such a wonderful group of people, all of whom had been starved of being able to do their job for a year and who were chomping at the bit.

The show means something different now, or at least feels more potent thematically. A piece about community, connection, a need for time with loved ones and about isolation is inevitably going to hit harder off the back of 2020 (and let's be honest, 2021 so far). Even more so, a piece that highlights black struggle and systemic racism, celebrates black lives, and champions black love is needed more than ever, and will surely hit different for audiences now.

It's a privilege to be able to tell the story of Celie and in doing so celebrate all those who live on the margins of society, or within the intersections of identity. Celie navigates being black in a white supremacist world, being a woman in a man's world, poor in a capitalist world and queer in a world where that's not even presented as a possibility for her. Celie's story is at once extremely specific and entirely universal. She's based on a real person. We don't take that responsibility lightly.

Our new version of *The Color Purple* is in the round, and without our set and most of our props. All we have is the stage, the words and the story. Alex Lowde's wonderful costumes remain to help to locate us and give us insight into our characters, Ben Cracknell has lit our 'magic circle' of a stage to feel close and intimate, and Tom Marshall has designed a soundscape that keeps us rooted in rural Tennessee. It's been really thrilling to boil it all down to its essentials and find that the heart of the story and of our original production is still beating.

We only had ten days to make the show. The cast turned up on day one and - led by Alex Parker - pulled the melodies, lyrics and harmonies from deep in their memories from almost two years ago. Mark Smith reimagined and simplified our choreography to fit a world of social distancing whilst retaining the fun and expressiveness of the company and our original show. I worked with the actors to find the truth and detail behind the words and figure out how to tell our story for people not sitting with us in the auditorium but at home in their living rooms. The team at Crosscut Media have done an amazing job in capturing our work for screen and we're excited to share it with you.

All of us on *The Color Purple* team hope you enjoy experiencing *The Color Purple at Home*. And we look forward to when we can all be reunited with audiences in the theatre again.

**Tinuke Craig** Director



# SYNOPSIS

## ACT I

- Before the story starts, Celie (aged 14) has had one child, who she called Olivia. At the beginning of the musical, Celie has another child, who she calls Adam. The father of the children is the man that Celie believes is her own father, Pa. Pa has taken both of Celie's children away from her and she does not know whether they are dead or alive
- Mister asks Pa for Nettie's hand in marriage but receives Celie's instead
- Celie arrives at Mister's farm to find it unkept and unloved. Mister and Celie do not have a happy life together, as Mister treats Celie very badly
- Nettie comes to stay with Mister and Celie for a time. But once Mister tries to attack Nettie, she leaves for good. She promises to write to Celie
- Harpo brings home Sofia. They marry but their union quickly sours. Celie's advice to Harpo, that he should beat his wife to make her obedient, makes things worse
- Harpo makes a juke joint out of his old home with Sofia, and finds a new love interest, Squeak
- Shug Avery arrives in town stays with Mister and Celie. Shug is unwell and Celie helps nurse her back to health
- Celie befriends Shug and discloses her past with Nettie
- Old Mister learns of Shug residing with his son
- Shug dispels Celie's lack of self-confidence by reassuring her of her beauty
- Shug sings at Harpo's juke joint. Sofia returns with a new love interest, making Harpo jealous. Squeak becomes angry which leads to a fight
- Shug tells Celie she's going back on the road. Shug and Celie reveal they have romantic feelings for each other. Shortly after, Shug reveals she's found letters addressed to Celie. Celie discovers Nettie is alive.

## ACT II

- Celie reads Nettie's letter. Nettie states she found refuge with a local reverend who was travelling to Africa on a missionary trip. Nettie reveals Celie's children are alive and with her in Africa
- Harpo tells Celie about Sofia's imprisonment – she has been arrested for challenging the Mayor's wife. Celie and Harpo both visit her in jail and Celie is distressed by Sofia's broken spirit
- Celie begins writing to Nettie again. She declares she'll write to her sister every day until they meet again
- Shug returns for Mister's Easter dinner. Shug is now married to Grady. At the dinner table, Celie reveals her knowledge of the hidden letters and in turn curses Mister for his wrongdoing. She leaves Mister and heads to Memphis with Shug and Squeak
- Mister descends into turmoil whilst Celie's life begins to flourish. She inherits her father's house and store. She transforms it into a boutique selling pants (trousers)
- Harpo and Sofia fall in love again
- Mister apologises to Celie and begs for her hand in marriage, but Celie says they should just be friends
- Nettie returns with Celie's children, Adam and Olivia. Finally, her family are reunited.



# ALICE WALKER BIOGRAPHY



**Alice Walker** was born on 9 February 1944 in segregated Eatonton, Georgia, USA, the last of 8 children and daughter of a sharecropper. After losing an eye in an accident at the age of eight she immersed herself in her studies and took full advantage of educational opportunities, although she and her mother had to fight for her to stay in school. In 1964 she left Georgia having won a scholarship; first to Spelman, a leading black college, then to Sarah Lawrence College in New York. She became a political activist and returned to the southern states in the late 1960s to campaign for civil rights, as well as teaching and writing poetry and short stories. In 1968 she married Melvyn Leventhal, a human rights lawyer, and they had a daughter, Rebecca. It was the first interracial marriage in Mississippi but the couple divorced in the early 1970s. Her first novel, published in 1970, was *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*.

In 1982, Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* was published. It is written in an epistolary style, meaning that it takes the form of a series of letters written by the characters, with Celie at the centre of the story. The novel spans over forty years, starting in the early part of the 20th century. It tells through the correspondence of Celie's abuse from her father, her abusive marriage to Mister and her estrangement

from her sister Nettie, as well as the sale of her child by her father and her infatuation with the glamorous night-club singer Shug Avery. It ends with Celie finding peace as someone with financial independence, and reunited with her beloved sister and children.

Walker published several more novels, as well as a sequel to *The Color Purple* called *Possessing the Secret of Joy* but none were as well-received. Walker has also published several short story collections and poetry and released new novels as recently as 2013. Walker's writing focusses heavily on themes of sexism and racism and specifically on the lives of black women in America.

Thadious M. Davis, in his *Dictionary of Literary Biography* essay, says of Alice Walker: '*Walker writes best of the social and personal drama in the lives of familiar people who struggle for survival of self in hostile environments. She has expressed a special concern with exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumph of black women.*'

In her own words: '*I would like to call myself revolutionary, for I am always changing and growing, it is hoped for the good of more black people... the truest and most enduring impulse I have is simply to write... Our people are waiting.*'

# CHARACTERS



# THE COLOR PURPLE at HOME

In this section we hear from some of the show's cast about their characters, how they get into character, their acting careers and advice for those who are interested in following the acting path.

## CHARACTERS IN THE MUSICAL

- CELIE** A woman from Georgia whose story begins when she is 14
- NETTIE** Celie's younger sister
- PA** Celie and Nettie's father
- MISTER** A local farm owner who becomes Celie's husband
- HARPO** Mister's son from his first marriage
- SOFIA** Harpo's wife
- SHUG AVERY** Mister's long-time love, a singer who lives in Memphis
- CHURCH LADIES** Jarene, Doris, Darlene
- ENSEMBLE** The Preacher, the Field Hands, the Church Soloist, Adam, Olivia, Squeak and Grady, Ol' Mister and others in the community







## JO SERVI

PREACHER & GRADY

### Tell us a bit about your character.

The Preacher, who is also Shug Avery's dad, is a charismatic preacher. He speaks in big images, if that makes sense. The delivery of the words which he speaks is very... not grand but big, inspiring, captivating. His responsibility is to his flock, to keep the members of his congregation on the right path, a responsibility that he takes very seriously, because at stake are their mortal souls.

Grady, Shug's husband, is a man who has made good. He is removed from slavery, he has money and means and a big car, a status symbol. That said, he is definitely punching above his weight, with Shug! He is not very secure around her. She is not the kind of woman who needs a man to protect her.

### What helps you get into character? Did you do any specific research?

For the Preacher, I had a Bible, a real Bible, on set, at the lectern. Before every show, while I was waiting for the show to begin and for my big reveal, I would read Psalms. Psalm 100 begins "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord," which is the message in *Mysterious Ways*, our opening number. To have that connection with the Word was very special.

### Can you describe an exercise or moment in rehearsals which was really useful?

There was a moment, at the end of the show, when we weren't sure how to stage *The Color Purple*, the finale song at the reunion, the party. I suggested that we just greet each other, as we would at a reunion party so, we tried it. The effect that it had on us was quite profound. Just walking amongst each other, looking each other in the eye and nodding, shaking hands, a pat on the back, or a hug. All of the emotions that we had experienced throughout the play came to fruition, here. People smiled, people gave knowing looks, people cried, actually cried! It was very moving.

### How did you become an actor?

The truth? By accident! I was a singer and have been singing, according to my mother, since I was about 18 months old. I had aspirations of being a pop star and had done several recordings in a studio. After seeing a friend's end of year college show, I felt like I was on the wrong side of the pit so I auditioned for that college, which was mainly a dance college. I got in and it was there that I discovered acting. I've probably always been an actor, I just didn't realise it. All singing is acting. Acting is about telling stories.

### What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be an actor or work in theatre?

Be prepared to work hard. Nothing is going to come easy. Disappointment and rejection are part of the game. You won't get every job that you go for but it's not necessarily a reflection on you, or your talent, it could simply be that you're not right for that part, or not as right as somebody else. Don't take things personally. The theatrical community is a big one, so you can make lots of friends and have a great deal of support. We're like family, really. For me, a big surprise is working on productions with people whom I've not met, although it is always nice to work with people who you know.

Be the best you that you can be, nobody else can be that. We're all unique and have something to offer, don't try to be somebody else.





# ROSEMARY ANNABELLA NKRUMAH

DARLENE

## **Tell us a bit about your character.**

Darlene is one of the three church ladies, she likes a good old gossip and spends a lot of time doing just that throughout the play.

## **What helps you get into character? Did you do any specific research?**

Quite often props and costume help me get into character. As soon as I put her glasses on and pick up that handkerchief she carries I know I'm fully able to embody the character of Darlene.

## **Can you describe an exercise or moment in rehearsals which was really useful?**

Working with our choreographer Mark Smith, who is deaf, changed my ideas around visual creativity.

## **How did you become an actor?**

I became an actor through getting involved in musical theatre projects, which has led to different types of acting opportunities.

## **What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be an actor or work in theatre?**

Work on your craft, take acting classes and work with a good vocal coach if you sing. Same goes for dance classes - if you can act, sing and dance it opens you up to more opportunities.





**AKO  
MITCHELL**  
MISTER

**Tell us a bit about your character.**

I play Mister. He's from a family of farmers and makes a modest living. He's a man beset by disappointment as he's made choices for other people rather than for himself, which has made him an extremely unkind person. His alienation of his family and friends eventually causes him great distress and he begins to reflect on his choices and actions and ultimately chooses to change - an option open to all of us.

**What helps you get into character? Did you do any specific research?**

I think every role and show is different. *The Color Purple* novel was the place to start. It gave me a great deal of insight into all of the characters, situations, and motivations. The film provided interesting observations as well. The play's libretto goes even further in giving us some more detailed background into Mister and his inner demons. I think all of this combined was a great starting point. I've also incorporated men - especially older relatives - whom I know and have studied - and their motivations and demons. I think of Mister as an awful bully who is at core frightened and lonely, when he discovers this truth, he is finally freed.

**Can you describe an exercise or moment in rehearsals which was really useful?**

Early on during rehearsals our company did a performance of the song 'Color Purple' for a visiting company in the rehearsal room. The entire room was in tears by the song's end. It reinforced the power of our collective energy when we focus together and truly exude love. It gave us in essence what the piece was all about.

**How did you become an actor?**

I did TV commercials when I was a child and admittedly I loved the attention. My first professional adult acting job was *The Lion King*. I went to an open audition in Leicester - at the Haymarket - and I was fortunate enough to be hired. It was very lucky - but I'd been preparing to be lucky my entire life.

**What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be an actor or work in theatre?**

I'd say most importantly do it because you absolutely love it. It's so very difficult and requires such an enormous amount of resiliency - love is essential. And go see as much theatre as you can. There is an enormous amount of material archived online. Watch it all. And be true to yourself. There is only one you! Good luck!



## ANELISA LAMOLA

CHURCH SOLOIST

### Tell us a bit about your character.

I play the part of Church Soloist. Church Soloist is the standard sister we all grow to love every Sunday because she always brings the gospel and soul. She is very warm and loving woman who loves the lord.

### What helps you get into character? Did you do any specific research?

When I'm doing my makeup, I listen to old Gospel music to get into the Sunday service experience. (I also Meditate for at least 10 minutes to centre myself).

Luckily for me I grew up in a Methodist church household and I used sing with my family everyone morning before church. So, I've drawn my character from my mom.

### Can you describe an exercise or moment in rehearsals which was really useful?

Our incredible Director Tinu sat us down at the beginning of rehearsals had us sit in a circle to discuss what the show meant to us and what we thought the message throughout the show was to us individually. That really helped us to look deeper into the story beyond the script and into the era and learning about the real-life people that have endured similar experiences.

### How did you become an actor?

I started singing at the age of 7 at church, but later on in life I joined an amateur theatre company where I had my first experience of training and learning on the job. I auditioned for drama schools and eventually got into Mountview Academy on the Musical Theatre course.

### What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be an actor or work in theatre?

The first thing I will say is Believe in yourself even when others don't see the vision/dream.

Lose all Fear because Fear is the only thing standing in your way.

Learn your craft inside out and explore your talent. And don't forget the learning never stops.

Be kind to yourself and don't compare yourself to others because the wonderful thing about this industry is uniqueness is what will make you stand out.

And last but not least Work hard because this industry is a very competitive world.

*"If you stay ready you ain't got to get ready"*

So, stay on top of your game and don't forget to have fun, it's ART afterall.





## **GEOFF AYMER**

**OL' MISTER**

### **Tell us a bit about your character.**

As well as being part of the ensemble, I play Ol' Mister i.e. Mister's father—grandpa to Harpo. The farm that Mister owns, originally belonged to Ol' Mister. He was born a slave on this farm and the land means a lot more to him than it does to his son. He therefore thinks he has higher standards than his son does and is a bit of a bully to Mister.

### **What helps you get into character? Did you do any specific research?**

I don't do lots of research. If a play is well written, as this is, all the clues for the character are in the script. It's all about using your imagination and empathy—sensing how someone born in the slave era might feel—and building on that.

### **Can you describe an exercise or moment in rehearsals which was really useful?**

I did two auditions for this role—the initial one and the recall. Ahead of the recall, I was asked to come up with an improvised monologue surrounding two of the characters that they were thinking of casting me as. One of those was Ol' Mister. So I had to imagine how it felt for a man like that to have come by this land, having gone from being a slave to a free man; imagine how hard he'd had to work to maintain it; and how upset he felt at the prospect of his son throwing all this away to chase Shug Avery, a woman he didn't think was very reputable. This exercise helped me once rehearsals started.

### **How did you become an actor?**

It was initially just meant to be a hobby and a way to help me overcome incredible shyness. However, after performances in a couple of amateur dramatic and youth theatre shows, I developed a real taste for it and thought I might have a bit of genuine talent, so I kept going. I was in my mid/late 20s when I made that decision. I also kind of accidentally fell into doing stand-up comedy for a while which helped get my foot in the door of doing professional work.

### **What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be an actor or work in theatre?**

If you've got the talent and the desire, just go for it. But please be prepared to work very hard as there are lots of very talented people out there. Basically anything in life worth having requires a lot of hard work and sacrifice. Also, try and strike a balance between having strong belief in yourself whilst also remaining humble. Retaining humility means that you are always willing to learn new things and take steps to improve. If you get to a point where you think you know everything, that can be problematic because arrogance and complacency set in and you stop growing as both a performer and as a person. Maintaining strong self-belief is equally important because you will face disappointments along the way. If you have strong belief, it'll help you be more determined and stay the course.





# PÉROLA CONGO

SQUEAK

## Tell us a bit about your character.

My character is Squeak – she’s got that nickname because of her high pitched voice. She’s a go-getter and will work hard using her talents and charms to get what she wants. She’s also very tough and brave – sometimes naively!

## What helps you get into character?

Finding the way a character walks and talks really helps me, once that feels right I know I’ve found the character. Also, costume and shoes – once I’m in them I really feel like I’m Squeak.

## Did you do any specific research?

Yes, I read the book before starting the contract. It was really useful; it gave me so much information on my character and context about the setting and the inner life of Celie. Squeak in the novel and the show are quite different though; in the novel she’s more demure and shy, whereas my Squeak is more front-footed and bold.

## Can you describe an exercise or moment in rehearsals which was really useful?

It’s important for me to do vocal exercises in my mix to before I’m talking and singing as Squeak. Her voice high pitched and squeaky, so I have to make sure it’s in safe place without pushing, so I don’t tire myself out or cause vocal injury.

## How did you become an actor?

I decided I wanted to act when I was about 14 and I had an amazing drama teacher in secondary school (shout out to Ms Langdon!) who told me about performing arts schools I could apply for, helping me with my applications, audition material and supporting me throughout the process – I genuinely had no clue about this career and I wouldn’t be an actor without her guidance at the start of my journey.

## What’s your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be an actor or work in theatre?

Do the prep, feel the fear and do it anyway, and when the fear bubbles up, dive into the work!



# CHARACTER EXERCISES

## SCENE STUDY

In this exercise, we focus on one scene from the musical, the Easter Dinner scene at Mister and Celie's house.

In early rehearsals, the director and actors read scenes in detail and think about character's motivations, emotions and how the text should be delivered. Imagine that you are at a "table read" of the play and are either an actor playing one of the characters, or a member of the creative team. As you explore the questions below, think about how this informs your ideas of the script, characters, and ideas for the musical.

### *The Easter Dinner* – [link to script](#)



#### Activity:

1. In groups, read the scene and perform it with the characters of Celie, Shug, Mister, Sofia, Squeak, Old Mister and Grady.
2. Break out into smaller groups (one group per character) to discuss their role and development at the dinner, as below.
3. As the students embody the protagonists or discuss their roles: consider the **motivations, physicality, dialogue, and power structures established/questioned** in this scene.

#### Shug

Shug has returned with her new partner which internally breaks Mister's heart. As the meal progresses, Shug's true intentions behind her return become clear.

- What are Shug's true motivations for marriage?
- How does Shug show her alliance with Celie at the dinner?

#### Celie

After years of neglect and mistreatment at the hands of Mister; Celie finally breaks her silence. Instead of writing her frustrations down, she vocalises them in front of everyone.

- Consider the emotional impact of discovering her sister's letters. How do you think this changes Celie's personality?
- Why does Celie curse Mister?

#### Mister

Heartbroken by Shug's new marriage, Mister falls back into his old personality trait which involves making others feel small for him to feel superior. However, he verbally assaults Celie for the last time ('You black, you poor, you ugly, you a woman. I shoulda just locked you up. Just let you out to work'), resulting in the ultimate play for dominance in their marriage.

- Why does Mister stay quiet about his heartbreak towards Shug and her husband?
- How does Celie's curse and defiance affect his position of power in his family?
- How does Mister show signs of misogyny (hatred towards Black women)?

#### Sofia

Once a proud, outspoken woman, Sofia has been broken by the weight of the world. In this scene, she seems to be swallowed by the conversation and responds in short sentences to avoid conflict and being perceived as confrontational. However, during this scene, Sofia begins to find her voice again.

- Consider Sofia's displacement at the dinner table. How could you show her discomfort without stating her emotions verbally?
- What causes Sofia to break her silence and return to her former self?



# CHARACTER EXERCISES continued

## Squeak

Dubbed as “Squeak” due to her high-pitched voice, her submissiveness allows Harpo to feel like he’s the head of his household. However, in this scene, we also see Squeak declare her desire for singing and break free from her relationship with Harpo.

- Why is Squeak’s dream of singing significant to her character development? (how does this push her character out of her comfort zone)?

## Old Mister

Present as the overall patriarch (male head/leader of a family or a community). His place at the table influences Mister to display performative masculine traits that can be perceived as toxic by the audience and other characters such as Celie and Harpo.

- How does Old Mister’s position at the table affect the power dynamics?
- What values does Old Mister represent?

## Further questions:

- How do power structures change at the dinner table? How do the characters show this by their physicality and dialogue?
- How does the dinner table reflect the characters’ relationship with the wider world?

## Physical Activities:

1. Create three tableaux to represent the beginning, middle and end of the scene, which together show the journey of the scene.
2. For each character, find three objects at home or in the classroom which you think might be significant for this character and create a sequence of movements inspired by the scene, incorporating all three objects.
3. Pick a character and physicalize how they sit at the table at the beginning of the scene and how they would sit at the table at the end of the scene. Are they upright or slouched, proud and bold or afraid? Does their posture change between the beginning and end of the scene?
4. To explore the physicality of each character when they move, pick one character and move around your space. Try leading your body with different body parts (like the nose, tummy, shoulders or forehead). Which leading part feels most natural for this character? Then try moving around the space really heavily or lightly, directly or indirectly, slowly or quickly – which style of movement feels most appropriate for inhabiting the character?







# THE WORLD OF THE MUSICAL

In this section we introduce themes of the musical and story, and historical events and ideas which inform the world of the play. The Director and creative team would research these topics to help shape, guide and understand the story, text and characters.

You might like to choose three or four topics below to research in depth to aid your own understanding of *The Color Purple*.

Please note that our examples of links to articles and videos are not definitive sources – they are suggestions of starting points for research, and may help you find your own facts and opinions.

# THEMES OF THE MUSICAL

## RACE AND OPPRESSION

Throughout the play, racism and oppression present themselves in many ways. Primarily, the audience sees female characters such as Celie and Nettie oppressed by male dominance, which usually takes place in the family home. Right from the start of the musical, we see how Celie is abused and violated by the men around her, including the man she believes is her father, and her husband Mister, who treats her with contempt. Nettie is banished from her family because she refuses to accept Mister's advances.

On a larger scale, the audience can see racial oppression, which affects all the characters. Interestingly, some of the play's oppressive characters such as the Mayor's wife are spoken about but never seen on stage with the Black characters in the story.

### Discussion points:

- Why do you think the writer chose to keep some of the oppressive characters offstage?
- Class debate: Has oppression in America become better or worse since the early 20th century?

### Links:

- Thinking About Race with the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>
- An introduction to racial tension in the 1920s USA: <https://youtu.be/Jwangllb60g>
- Segregation explained by young people: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sff2N8rez\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sff2N8rez_8)



# THEMES OF THE MUSICAL continued

## RELIGION AND FAITH

Christianity and the idea of faith are woven into the storyline. Celie's addresses to God result in an honest, confidential view of Celie's thoughts. As the play progresses, Celie's perspective on God changes. Celie develops in character and she begins to realise a personalised relationship with God, and that God can exist inside of people and be found in what we experience.

### Discussion points:

- What is Celie's relationship with God and how does this develop over the musical?
- How do Celie's relationships with other people influence her faith?

### Link:

- Mahalia Jackson: One of America's first mainstream gospel artists  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blu3G77A3Ws>

## FEMINISM

The importance of female alliance is a prominent theme within the play. This can be seen within Celie and Nettie's heart-warming relationship at the beginning of the story, which creates a haven away from male dominance and racial oppression. As the story introduces characters such as Shug Avery, Sofia, and Squeak; the audience will see a strong network of Black women sticking together in companionship and love.

### Discussion points:

- In a group, discuss the different ways the writers bring the female characters together in solidarity
- There are moments in the musical when the female characters are not united. What are the main reasons for these occurrences?

### Links:

- A mini guide to feminism: <https://kids.kiddle.co/Feminism>
- 'We should all be feminists', Ted Talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie:  
[https://youtu.be/hg3umXU\\_qWc](https://youtu.be/hg3umXU_qWc)



# THEMES OF THE MUSICAL continued

## LGBTQ+

Celie suffers and is forced to simply endure life in the first part of the story, but when she meets Shug Avery, she discovers feelings of sexual love and companionship that she's never felt before, and which grow throughout the musical. It is through her romantic relationship with Shug that Celie discovers, and comes to accept and believe in, her true self. Even when Shug leaves her for the young musician Germaine, Celie transforms her feelings of abandonment into a statement of firm self-confidence and empowerment in the song 'I'm Here'.

### Discussion points:

- How does the musical present gay love in comparison to heterosexual love and relationships?
- How does Celie's relationship with Shug change her sense of self, and why?
- *The Color Purple* is one of the most iconic LGBTQ+ stories of all time. Do some research to find out about other books, films, plays or musicals that are also important to the LGBTQ+ community.

### Links:

- Article - *The Color Purple*: A sublime portrayal of lesbianism ahead of its time:  
<https://www.dailyca.org/2020/02/25/the-color-purple-a-sublime-portrayal-of-lesbianism-ahead-of-its-time/>
- Article - Remembering *The Color Purple* as a Queer Story:  
<https://www.themarysue.com/remembering-the-color-purple-as-a-queer-story/>

## ECONOMICS

In the early 20th century, we begin to see the rise of African American businesses and their monetary contribution to the American economy. Entrepreneurship is sewn throughout the play with ventures such as such as Shug's successful music career, Celie's 'Folkspants Unlimited' and Harpo's juke joint.

### Research:

Research five Black American businesses that have helped contribute to modern society. Some examples can include:

- Beats by Dre
- Tidal streaming service

### Link:

- The rise of Black businesses in America:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJjPEBCfBFQ>



# THEMES OF THE MUSICAL continued

## GENDER NORMS

In Harpo and Sofia's relationship, we see that Sofia is more suited to being in "alpha" position; often speaking her mind and being unapologetically bold in her personality. Their relationship dynamic is a challenge to traditional male and female roles. In the 20th century western culture, gender norms were fixed and sometimes constricting. Men were expected to be dominant and women were perceived as the weaker sex, often resulting in men being considered more important and superior.

### Discussion points:

- How do we view gender norms in 21st century Britain?
- Has this changed since the time *The Color Purple* is set?

### Links:

- Gender norms:  
<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/blogs/how-gender-roles-affect-young-people>
- Women's roles in the 1930's:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GNCAiK\\_06Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GNCAiK_06Y)

## FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Traditional family structures are consistently questioned in *The Color Purple*. At the beginning and throughout the piece, the protagonists view marriage and children as a remedy to poverty and means for social elevation, protection, and overall happiness. However, as the characters evolve and learn their core values, supportive friends or lovers become surrogate family. The final scenes see Celie reunited with family members who were taken away from her and surrounded by new family members who have been adopted through love, friendship and solidarity.

### Discussion points:

- How have family structures changed over time?
- Class activity: monologue/poetry exercise – Write a short monologue or spoken word poem about what your family or best friends mean to you.

### Links:

- American family structures:  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today/>
- British family structures:  
<https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/british-culture/british-culture-family>



# HISTORICAL CONTEXT RELATING TO THE MUSICAL & STORY

## THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

1960's America saw a resurgence of protests, boycotts and political statements from African Americans who were fighting for civil rights and an end to segregation laws. One of the figureheads for the movement was Martin Luther King Jr, a minister and activist from Atlanta, Georgia. His speech, "I Have A Dream" has become one of the most famous speeches of all time due to its call for equality and peace across the nation.

At the same time, there were other leaders of the civil rights movement such as Malcolm X and James Baldwin who had different approaches to gaining equality. Malcolm X believed in a more radical approach to racial equality and has often been perceived as more aggressive in politics. However, without the balance of these leaders, the civil rights movement would have failed in creating an inclusive space for all Black Americans (regardless of class, skin tone and religion) to feel supported and protected.

Walker, a vocal civil rights activist, was personally impacted by segregation and racism in her home country. This influenced her literature, both fictional and academic, and is reflected in her more defiant characters such as Sofia and in Celie's unyielding spirit.

|   |             |   |
|---|-------------|---|
| <b>Celie</b> begins first letter  | <b>1913</b> |    |
| <b>Celie</b> marries <b>Albert</b> (Mister)   | <b>1919</b> |   |
| <b>Nettie</b> runs away   | <b>1921</b> |    |
| <b>Harpo</b> and <b>Sofia</b> marry   | <b>1926</b> |   |
|   | <b>1929</b> | <b>Hallelujah!</b> The first film with an all black cast is released in America.  |
| <b>Shug</b> comes to stay with <b>Albert &amp; Celie</b>                            | <b>1930</b> |   |
|   | <b>1931</b> | The <b>Scottsboro' Boys</b> are arrested – a group of young black African-American boys are arrested accused of rape and assault.   |
| <b>Nettie's</b> first letter given to <b>Celie</b>                                  | <b>1935</b> |   |
|   | <b>1936</b> | <b>Jesse Owens</b> wins four gold medals at the Summer Olympics in Berlin.  |
|   | <b>1939</b> | World War II begins, African-Americans enlist.  |
|   | <b>1940</b> | <b>Hattie McDaniel</b> is the first African-American to win an Academy Award.   |
|  | <b>1941</b> | The <b>Fair Employment Act</b> is issued by Roosevelt.  |
|   | <b>1942</b> | The <b>Committee on Racial Equality</b> is founded.   |
|   | <b>1943</b> | The <b>Detroit Race Riot</b> , which lasts for 3 days.  |
| <b>Celie</b> is reunited with <b>Nettie</b> and her children                        | <b>1945</b> |    |
|  | <b>1947</b> | <b>Jackie Robinson</b> plays for the Brooklyn Dodgers.  |
|  | <b>1950</b> | Under court order, University of Virginia admits an African American student to its law school.   |
|  | <b>1954</b> | The beginning of the <b>African-American Civil Rights Movement</b> .  |
|  | <b>1955</b> | The Supreme Court rules that desegregation must occur with 'all deliberate speed.'  |
|  | <b>1956</b> | Singer <b>Nat King Cole</b> assaulted during a segregated performance.  |
|  | <b>1957</b> | A report is published in the New York Times highlighting that in 3 years since the Supreme Court ruling 11 southern states have failed to desegregate.                                    |
|  | <b>1960</b> | Four African-American students sit at a lunch counter in Greensboro and spark six months of the <b>Civil Rights Act</b> of 1960 signed by Eisenhower.                                     |
|  | <b>1961</b> | Interstate buses display the following notice, 'Seating aboard this vehicle is without regard to race, color, creed, or national origin, by order of the Interstate Commerce Commission.' |

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT RELATING TO THE MUSICAL & STORY

continued

## Discussion points:

- James Baldwin was a civil rights activist who did an excellent job documenting the movement. His book “I Am Not Your Negro” comments on the civil rights movement and shows all sides of the activist spectrum. His writing was powerful and has educated generations after his death. Whilst he may not have been the loudest in the room, there is always space for deep thinkers, writers, and observers to shape a movement.

## Research other key figures who paved the way:

- Rosa Parks • Harriet Tubman • Sojourner Truth

## Links:

- A short history of the Civil Rights Movement: <https://youtu.be/URxwe6LPvkM>
- Website about Civil Rights Movement: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement>

## PROHIBITION

In a frantic attempt to stop its citizens from alcoholism, violence and scandal, the government placed a ban on all alcoholic beverages from 1920-1933.

This meant all establishments that once sold alcohol were now prohibited to do so by law. As a result, underground juke joints and “speakeasies” became exceedingly popular, which were kept off the radar of law enforcement and government officials. Juke joints were also looked down on by the church, as they viewed them as sinful and disrespectful to the country’s laws.

## Research:

During restrictive laws, the “roaring” 20’s become one of the most vibrant decades in history. As well as researching prohibition, you may want to look at:

- Fashion of the era • Films • Music

Do you see any similarities between 1920’s and the modern age?

## Link:

- US prohibition era: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_uU9GMJ8a5w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_uU9GMJ8a5w)

## THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Often referred to as “The Depression”, this period saw a colossal economic downturn in America and across the globe. Following the Wall Street crash of 1929, the country saw the value of money plummet at a rapid speed, causing families to descend into poverty, hunger, and a never-ending cycle of unemployment.

## Discussion point:

Consider how the depression affected those who were marginalised in American society such as ethnic minorities, working class and other communities outside of government support.

## Link:

- The Great Depression: <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Great-Depression/353208>



# HISTORICAL CONTEXT RELATING TO THE MUSICAL & STORY

continued

## BLACK SUFFRAGE

After the American civil war in 1870, all men, regardless of race, were given the right to vote, but women's political voices were still being silenced and denied. On 18th August 1920, White women across America were given the right to vote, however, this did not extend to African American women and other ethnic minorities in the country. It was not until nearly fifty years later that Black women could finally vote in the U.S.

### Class/group discussion:

Why were White Americans reluctant to give Black people/ethnic minorities the right to vote?

### Links:

- Voting rights for African Americans:  
<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/elections/right-to-vote/voting-rights-for-african-americans/>
- Voting for Black women:  
<https://time.com/5876456/black-women-right-to-vote/>

## COMMUNITY COLLECTIVES

The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) is an organisation created by some of the best African American scholars, thinkers, and activists of the era. Their collective aim was to advocate for justice on behalf of Black people and fight for their advancement in American society. 112 years later, the NAACP is still a flourishing organisation continuing to support Black Americans against modern day racism.

### Discussion point:

- How did initiatives such as NAACP influence modern day racial activism groups like Black Lives Matter?

### Links:

- NAACP website: <https://naacp.org/>
- How the NAACP fights racial discrimination:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXi2IM7-NB8>





# HISTORICAL CONTEXT RELATING TO THE MUSICAL & STORY

continued

## RISE IN BLACK ARTISTS & SPORTSMANSHIP

The early 20th century saw the elevation of black musicians, artists and sports personnel. One sportsman in particular was Jesse Owens - an African American track and field athlete who rose to international fame after his gold medal win at the 1936 Berlin Olympic games. His performance overshadowed German athletes which left Adolf Hitler, leader of Nazi Germany, embarrassed on an international scale. After his death, President Jimmy Carter said, "Perhaps no athlete better symbolized the human struggle against tyranny, poverty and racial bigotry".

### Discussion point:

- Although Jesse won gold for America, he was refused an audience with the President because of his race. How does Jesse Owen's experience compare to other Black athletes both here in the UK and in the USA?

### Links:

- Jesse Owens facts! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfSPt8LxD5k>
- Jesse Owens Documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjLshS5KGI4>
- Olympic page memorial: <https://www.olympic.org/jesse-owens>



# RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

## BLACK LIVES MATTER

Born out of a hashtag, Black Lives Matter or BLM has become a social justice movement against racial inequality and police brutality in the U.S.

The movement emerged after the death of Trayvon Martin in 2013 – causing its founders to organise protests against corrupt law enforcement. BLM saw a global expansion following the death of George Floyd in 2020, when millions of protestors of all ages stood up in defiance to atrocities faced by Black people worldwide. Its roots stem from centuries of oppression, including the slave trade, segregation laws and racial injustices of the early 20th century – directly in the backdrop of Alice Walker’s childhood.

Between 2015 and 2020, the British branch of BLM rose to prominence. Their organisers created protests across the UK in solidarity with their American cousins and in protest against the racial inequalities faced here in Britain. Interestingly, some of the organisers from Birmingham and the Midlands region were only 18-20 years old, showing the power of youth activism and political thinking in the UK.

### Discussion point:

- What does it mean to make or experience a production of *The Color Purple* at a time when the Black Lives Matter movement is so prominent?

### Links:

- Website: <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>
- Black British feeling video from BBC Newsbeat: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB2IcH668xo>

## AFRICAN AMERICAN CONTRIBUTION TO MUSIC

Music has been at the heart of the African American population for generations. It serves as a powerful way to convey stories and historical events to wider audiences and is also very therapeutic. Throughout the musical, the audience is presented with genres such as Blues (which is an ancestor to modern day R&B music) and is also supported by the soulful sound of Gospel music. Throughout the past century, African American music has evolved with genres such as hip-hop, rock and Jazz uttering the plight of Black people in America and abroad.

### Discussion point:

- Has Black British music strived to achieve the same aims as African American music in relation to discussing inequality, race, and social progression and, if so, how?





# PRODUCTION TEAM

# THE COLOR PURPLE at HOME

The production team for *The Color Purple – At Home* combines those who originally created the production for the stage in 2019, plus a recording crew from Crosscut Media, a Leicester-based multimedia company. Members of the Crosscut team worked out how to capture the show on camera so that it can be enjoyed from home.

## THE TEAM

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>TINUKE CRAIG</b>   | Director                                       |
| <b>ALEX LOWDE</b>     | Designer                                       |
| <b>MARK SMITH</b>     | Choreographer                                  |
| <b>BEN CRACKNELL</b>  | Lighting Designer                              |
| <b>TOM MARSHALL</b>   | Sound Designer & Sound Production Mix Engineer |
| <b>KAY MAGSON CDG</b> | Casting Director                               |
| <b>ALICE TOWNES</b>   | Hair, Wigs and Make-Up Supervisor              |

## FOR CROSSCUT MEDIA

|                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>DAN FLANDERS</b>    | Video Producer & Editor |
| <b>JORDAN DEAN</b>     | Director of Photography |
| <b>DUNCAN MACLEOD</b>  | Camera Operator         |
| <b>MBILI MUNTHALI</b>  | Gimbal Operator         |
| <b>DAN HUNT</b>        | Crane Operator          |
| <b>FRANCESCA COSTA</b> | Camera Operator         |
| <b>MIGLE CIMZAITE</b>  | Camera Operator         |

We asked some of the creative team about their roles on the production, their concepts for the show, how they got into theatre and why they think *The Color Purple* is an important story to share.





**TINUKE  
CRAIG**  
DIRECTOR



**JORDAN  
DEAN**  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY



**ALEX  
PARKER**  
MUSICAL DIRECTOR



**BEN  
CRACKNELL**  
LIGHTING DESIGNER

**Could you tell us about your research when you're preparing for any show, and this one in particular?**

Everything comes back to the story and primarily reading the script to get a feel for what the story is we're telling, and then from there I'll work with the Director and creative team to work out the environment and where the story is taking place, and therefore how can lighting assist in telling that story.

**What have been the challenges about this work and what have you discovered?**

On this particular show, I guess the challenge is lighting something for camera, and lighting in this space which is in the round, so the camera can shoot from any direction. I have to make sure that whichever way the camera points, the pictures look wonderful.

**Can you describe a special moment during rehearsals?**

I think the first time the cast were on stage and hearing them sing together. I didn't design the lighting for the original production, so whereas other members of the team are re-visiting it, for me it's a whole new exciting adventure. Just listening to that fabulous music for the first time and seeing the actors on stage was wonderful.

**How did you end up becoming a lighting designer?**

My parents used to take me to the theatre, and we'd see the pantomimes, and I was always in awe of those productions and the technical wizardry behind them, so from that point of view I knew I wanted to be a part of that. I started working at my local theatre and eventually went to train at Rose Bruford College as a Lighting Designer, and from there I began working on the fringe and building up a lighting design portfolio, which got me here.

**Do you have any piece of advice for someone who wants to become a lighting designer?**

See as much stuff as you can – not just theatre, but television, look at art, take inspiration from all the material around you. Part of being a lighting designer is storytelling and I think if you can think of lighting you've seen before, or a painting that has helped convey a story, then you can use that in your own work.

# MARK SMITH

CHOREOGRAPHER



## Tell us about the style of choreography in the show and what inspired you.

The main aim when I choreographed *The Color Purple* was to make the movement authentic, grounded, earthy and real, with a bit of sparkle and a flash of passion and fire! My inspiration came from Harlem and the New York City nightclub called The Cotton Club. As a choreographer, I focused on the end of the nineteenth century through to the 1940s. I was inspired by popular dances including Ragtime, The Cakewalks; dances from the Jazz and Swing era like The "Charleston," the "Black Bottom," the "Shimmy," the "Foxtrot," and the "Lindy Hop" and African dance, with a contemporary flavour sprinkled over it, as well as incorporating sign-language into the choreography. It brings me great joy to see the cast having such a fantastic time performing my choreography, as well as educating the audience in the history of dance.

## Did you have to adapt the choreography a lot for the socially distanced, recorded version of the show?

I had to make sure that everyone in the cast was standing 1 to 2 metres to each other. I had to make sure that they are not singing too close to each other. I always asked the cast to put their hands up if they weren't comfortable and safe in their space that they were put in. I had to change the staging and spacing compared to the original version in 2019. I had to check with the stage manager if she was happy with the spacing before I could move on with the choreography. I had to remove any body contact that was in my original choreography and change it into movement that worked well without any closeness and intimacy.

## Did you do any research? What's your process preparing for a show?

I watched many films on Youtube of how people used to dance from the 1890s to 1940s. I learned the names and different styles of dance so that I could teach the cast and incorporate it into the choreography. Tinuke (Director) and I did three days of workshops with the students at Bird College where we tried out ideas and filmed the work. After watching the film, we had a discussion about what would work for the show. It was really useful to try out choreography ideas at the workshop before the rehearsals, because it saved time and I felt confident knowing that it would work. It helped me to be more prepared and researched.

## What have you discovered doing this version of the production?

I've learned so much from doing the recording. It was a different and interesting experience for me to do the choreography and staging for the recording. I had to make sure the movement is quite simple and clear for the recording so that it will be easier for the editing and for the viewers to enjoy the show. If I made the choreography too busy, it would look messy on the recording. Instead of creating choreography from the audience point of view at the theatre, I visualised the camera shot on my choreography and I tried to capture movement with intimacy and emotion. I focused more on the characters in my choreography for the stream.

## Can you describe an interesting or special moment in rehearsals, or during preparation or in collaborating with other members of the creative team?

It was a really special experience and I felt so overwhelmed when I came back to Curve, because sadly all theatres have been closed for nearly a year during the pandemic and theatre is like being in my second home. It was wonderful to see the cast, creative team and the wonderful team at Curve again because I haven't seen them for 18 months. I noticed that *The Color Purple's* magic



never went away. It was still there when we all got together for the stream. I was amazed that the cast remembered the choreography after watching the archive of the original show and recapping the choreography. It came back to them naturally. It was a joy watching them having fun performing my choreography.

**As a deaf choreographer, you worked with Sign Supported English/British Sign Language Interpreters for this show. Could you tell us a bit about this and how they aided you on this show?**

I don't normally have SSE/BSL interpreters when I'm working on mainstream theatre. I communicate very well through lip-speaking. But this time, I had to book SSE/BSL interpreters for *The Color Purple - At Home* because everyone had to wear masks that covered their mouth. I knew it would be difficult for me to lipread them. Rehearsals & technical rehearsals were held on stage with the lighting, sound, camera crew and the band. It would be difficult for me to lipread everyone in the dark. I would struggle following different voices at the theatre. I was glad to have interpreters with me all day, so that I could keep on the same page with the team and know what was going on. It helped save time and was less stress.

**How did you become a choreographer?**

I always wanted to be a choreographer when I was training at performing arts college and working as a professional dancer. I learned the craft of choreography in the professional theatre industry by becoming a dance captain and assistant

choreographer. I developed my style of choreography when I choreographed for performing arts colleges. I gained my first professional choreography work when I choreographed a Gilbert & Sullivan all-male production called *Iolanthe* directed by Sasha Regan at The Union Theatre in London. The show received fantastic reviews and it got transferred to Wilton's Music Hall. Because of my style of choreography where I incorporated sign-language into movement in *Iolanthe*, I was invited to be one of five choreographers (alongside Kate Prince, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Aletta Collins and Stephen Mear) to create a piece called *Desire The Brands* for a musical revue *Shoes* at Sadler's Wells, London.

**What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be a choreographer or work in theatre?**

Go on YouTube and watch and learn everything about all the choreographers and their different backgrounds and style of dance. It's important to learn how all the choreographers work and how they choreographed their shows.

Learning different styles of dance is very useful for the choreography. Try to get a lot of experience as a professional dancer or musical theatre performer. Being dance captain or assisting choreographers are fantastic learning experiences in the theatre industry. Try to see many musical and dance productions because it's important to be inspired. Be familiar with all the directors' and choreographers' work and know their names. It's important to fully research and prepare before rehearsal. Also be collaborative, creative and open-minded.



# EXERCISES & IDEAS FOR TEACHERS & STUDENTS

## DESIGN

### SET DESIGN

Imagine you are designing a set for a production of the musical. In groups discuss and explore the following. You can talk through, write down, draw or sketch your ideas.

#### Activity: Creating a design concept.

- Think about the themes of the musical. Consider which are the most important themes to you, and consider how these might affect the visual style of your production of the musical including space, set, lighting and costumes.
- Make a list of locations in the story. How will you represent these locations?
- The musical takes place over a long period of time. Consider how you might show how time passes in your design for the musical.
- Think about how realistic your design is going to be. Will locations, objects and settings be represented literally or conceptually, and how will this affect the audience's understanding of the story and response to the themes?
- Create a visual mood-board for your design, including photos, drawings, colours and textures you will use as part of your design. The mood board could be physical, on paper, or on Pinterest.

#### Advanced activity: Making a model box.

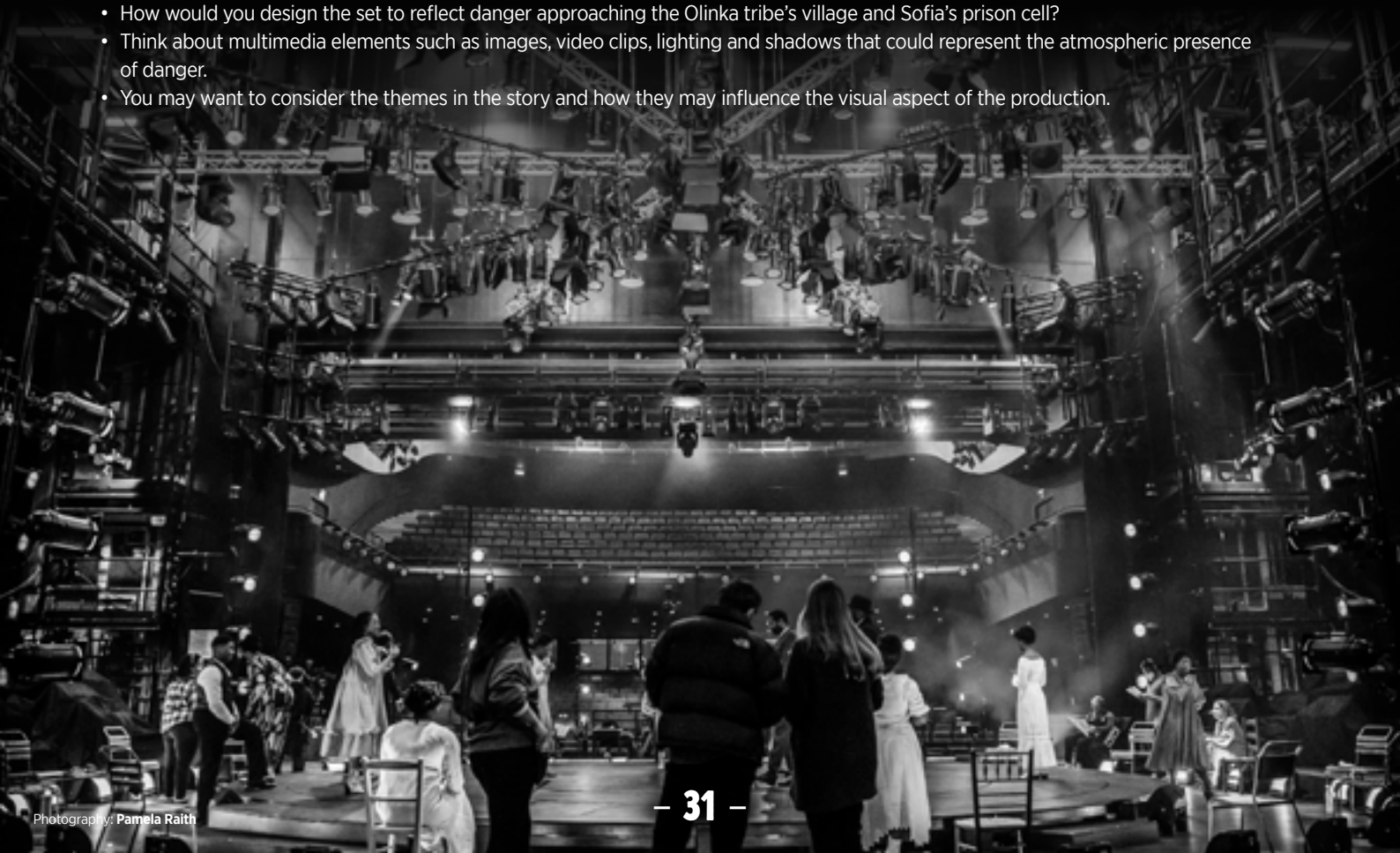
For a professional show, a Designer would think through all the aspects above and create a "white card model" - a scaled model of their design (e.g. 50 times smaller than the real life design) made of white cardboard (without colour). The Designer would then discuss this model with the Director and other members of the creative team to make sure they were happy with the initial design. The Designer would also discuss the white card with the producers of the show, to make sure the set could be built within the budget. Following these conversations, the Designer would adapt and develop their design and finally create a full colour scale model, which the set builders actually use and refer to when building the set.

Try creating a 3D model box, or elements of your design, out of cardboard. This can be very intricate, so don't worry too much about the scale if it's your first attempt!

#### Advanced activity: Offstage Presence – Onstage Impact

During the play, reference is made to racial oppression and its impact on the characters. However, the physical presence of these characters is not seen by the audience.

- How would you design the set to reflect danger approaching the Olinka tribe's village and Sofia's prison cell?
- Think about multimedia elements such as images, video clips, lighting and shadows that could represent the atmospheric presence of danger.
- You may want to consider the themes in the story and how they may influence the visual aspect of the production.





# EXERCISES & IDEAS FOR TEACHERS & STUDENTS

continued

## COSTUME DESIGN

A Costume Designer would consider:

- Will the costumes be realistic and of a specific period, or symbolic, or a mixture?
- How will costumes help to tell the story?
- Will each character have one costume or more than one?
- How do costumes illustrate characters' tastes, personality, status, wealth and preferences?

### Activity:

Think about whether the costumes for your production are going to be from the period the story is set, or more universal, timeless or modern. In the Curve production of *The Color Purple – At Home*, for example, the characters' costumes are of the period but with modern twists, like their boots.

- If your costumes are going to be from the period, research the period/s the story is set. How did fashion change over this time period and think about whether characters would have worn up-to-date fashion or not?
- If your costumes are not of the period, think clearly about why? Consider how contemporary designs will stay true to the story.
- Choose a character and draw a costume design(s) for them, or find imagery which represents their style.

### Miss Celie's Folkspants Unlimited

Clothing can be a statement of a political stance, idea or your personality. Celie's entrepreneurial venture into creating trousers is a symbolic display of the female characters in *The Color Purple* finally becoming in charge of their own destiny. Trousers were traditionally associated with men and it was therefore socially unacceptable for women to wear trousers for fear of breaking gender norms.

### Activity: Imagine Celie's store was to open in the 21st century.

- What item or piece of clothing that symbolises power would be created and designed in Celie's shop?
- How might Celie design these items (think about colours, patterns, prints, images, messages, text) to express ideas of protest, freedom, equality, empowerment, love etc?



# EXERCISES & IDEAS FOR TEACHERS & STUDENTS

continued

## WRITING

### MISSING LETTERS

*The Color Purple* musical is an adaptation from Alice Walker's epistolary novel (a book containing a series of letters).

Letter writing and praying are therapeutic ways for Celie to order her thoughts or understand her feelings.

However, some of Celie's family members such as Mister, Harpo, Sofia and Shug seldom use writing as a way to understand themselves, communicate with each other or overcome their problems.

#### **Activity: Choose one of the character scenarios below and write a letter on their behalf:**

- Sofia in prison. Write a letter exploring Sofia's feelings about being away from her family.
- Mister writing to his father about his resentment towards him.
- Harpo writing to Mister about their relationship.
- Mister writing to Shug about his feelings about her.
- Nettie writing a letter to Mister about his damaging effect on her relationship with Celie.

#### **Discussion points:**

- The intentions behind the letter.
- How might the recipient respond?

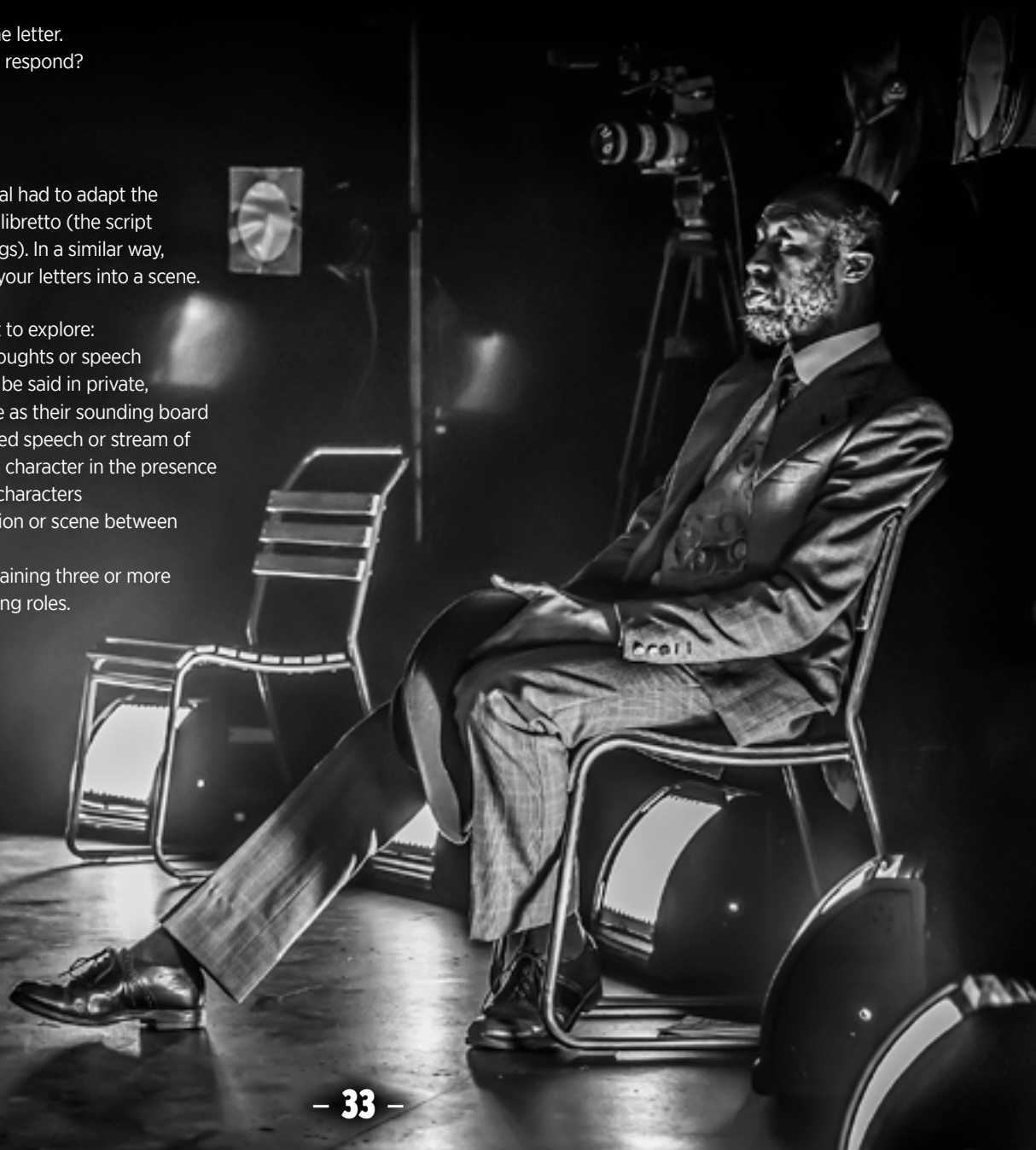
### ADAPTATION TO THE STAGE

#### **Activity:**

- The writers of the musical had to adapt the novel into the book and libretto (the script and the lyrics of the songs). In a similar way, you could adapt one of your letters into a scene.

Types of scenes you may want to explore:

- Soliloquy - Stream of thoughts or speech from one character. Can be said in private, often using the audience as their sounding board
- Monologue - An extended speech or stream of thoughts spoken by one character in the presence of another character or characters
- Duologue - A conversation or scene between two characters
- Dialogue - A scene containing three or more people who have speaking roles.



# EXERCISES & IDEAS FOR TEACHERS & STUDENTS

continued



## ACTING

### SOLILOQUIES AND DIRECT ADDRESS

In the musical, Celie's letters or prayers are delivered as soliloquies, a dramatic device where one character speaks aloud to themselves (observed by the audience) or directly to the audience, revealing their inner thoughts. This differs to a monologue, where a character speaks to another character.

#### Discussion point:

- Think about moments in the production where Celie spoke directly into the camera as if to us personally. Why do you think these moments of direct address were chosen, and how do these moments make the audience feel?

#### Activity:

- Choose one of Celie's letter or prayer from the book *The Color Purple*. Deliver this as a monologue or a soliloquy and decide what role the audience plays in hearing it. Does Celie talk to the audience directly or do they merely observe Celie? Is Celie challenging the audience or asking for their sympathy?

### CREATING PARALLEL AND RESPONSE SCENES

#### Activity:

*The Color Purple* is a text that transcends across generations and connects to the modern-day world. We can use the story and characters as stimuli for creating response scenes.

In groups, use the structure of the following scenes and see if you can create something contemporary. E.g.

- The Easter Dinner: a family sitting down to dinner and discussing a contentious topic, news story or event. Every member of the family has a different opinion, so a conflict is created. Can the family resolve the conflict or find a common view, or does the scene explode?
- Sofia's imprisonment: Sofia is put in prison in the musical because the Mayor's wife suggests Sofia becomes her maid and Sofia refuses. How can this scene relate to freedom of speech being hijacked and communities being muted? How could you dramatise action that happens offstage in the musical?
- Harpo's juke joint: Harpo sets up his own bar in the woods and asks Shug Avery to sing there – she causes a sensation. Imagine that you are creating a space for an artist to have a voice and share their artistry. How might you promote this space and artist in a modern way, such as through YouTube, Instagram or TikTok?



# EXERCISES & IDEAS FOR TEACHERS & STUDENTS

continued

## STAGING

At the moment, theatre is being created in socially distanced formats or online, rather than in ways we are used to. This means directors, actors and choreographers have to consider much more carefully their use of space and how they convey a sense of community, friendship, intimacy or conflict without touch.

### Activity:

Take a scene that you have adapted from one of your letters, or a scene from the musical, and stage it in socially distanced or online format. Think about how to convey a sense of community, friendship, intimacy or conflict without touching or being near each other, but instead using:

- Eye contact
- Blocking and where people are positioned in the space
- Voice
- Gesture, movement or choreography
- If acting happens online, how to use the space around you in your “box” on Zoom or Teams, or where to direct your speech
- Have one person act as the director of the group and have them feed back on what is effective for conveying the story, for the audience and the actors and why.



# EXERCISES & IDEAS FOR TEACHERS & STUDENTS

continued



## MUSIC

Music is used in the musical to:

- Express thoughts and feelings
- Show a character's progression or ambitions

For example:

Mister's Miss Celie's curse song

- Uses the style of a ballad (love songs) to discuss his pain
- Has outbursts of anger and voice breaks to convey his emotion

### Activity:

- As a class (or in groups) create a song to promote *The Color Purple* to an audience who have never seen it before.

In the song, you may want to include:

- A summary of the musical
- Touch on the themes discussed within the piece
- Try to add the emotion behind the words when singing/performing. For example, anger can be sung with the same emotion the word evokes
- As the play draws on musical inspiration from the 1900-1940's, students may want to research, use or fuse musical styles from the 21st century, for example Blues with hip hop or Jazz with EDM/Dance music





**For further information, please visit these organisations and websites:**

Smithsonian Institution: <https://www.si.edu/>

Black Lives Matter: <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>

Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation: <https://stephenlawrenceday.org/>

The King Centre: <https://thekingcenter.org/>

Black History Month: <https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/>

Alice Walker: <https://alicewalkersgarden.com/>

Curve's website: <https://www.curveonline.co.uk/>

Curve Classroom YouTube Playlist: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1CU\\_dYGkefFUP5zS8XYNwIF3tYCuViDt](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1CU_dYGkefFUP5zS8XYNwIF3tYCuViDt)

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