

SOCIAL JUSTICE SHORTS



TEACHER PRIMER PACKET





Welcome to the primer material for Playhouse Square's *Social Justice Shorts*. This bundled series showcases bite-sized performances with powerful lessons. The video "shorts" and accompanying primer and post-show videos are crafted to support important conversations and increase civic dialogue in the classroom. It is highly recommended to view the primer video, which is meant for educators, and preview all the performance videos prior to presenting material to the students.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



The three short plays selected were written by Idris Goodwin.

Idris Goodwin is an award-winning playwright, breakbeat poet, content creator and arts champion. He is a 2021 United States Artist Fellow who has written over 60 original plays. Goodwin has created for and performed on Nickelodeon, HBO's Def Poetry Jam, Sesame Street, NPR, BBC Radio and the Discovery Channel. After serving in many positions of leadership in theaters around the country, Idris is currently the Artistic Director at The Seattle Children's Theater.

ABOUT THE SHOWS

Playhouse Square is primarily a presenting theater, meaning that the performances are usually produced elsewhere and brought to Cleveland. *Social Justice Shorts* is a unique exception as this streaming performance was produced locally by the Playhouse Square Education department. Granted permission by playwright Idris Goodwin to produce his micro-plays, Playhouse Square's performance of *Social Justice Shorts* features actors and directors from the Cleveland area. This performance was created through a traditional theater rehearsal process and professionally filmed in the Westfield Studio Theatre so the work of Cleveland artists could be showcased to schools all over the world.





DIRECTED BY ANANIAS DIXON

Actors

Kid 1: Carl Walton

Kid 2: Javion Allen

Kid 3: Sierra Ya'Tis

Three characters wrestle with what newfound freedom means and how it will change their relationship with those who have already lived free.

Standards aligned:

Social & Emotional Learning: C3.2.c, C3.2.d

Social Studies: 7.Gov.16, 8.Geo.18,
8.His.12, 8.His.13, 8.His.14





NOTHING RHYMES WITH JUNETEENTH

DIRECTED BY CHENNELLE BRYANT HARRIS

Actors

Mother: Andrea Belser

Daughter: Adrionna Powell Lawrence

Through rap and relationship, this show explores the history of how Juneteenth came to be.

Standards aligned:

Social & Emotional Learning: C3.2.c, C3.2.d

Social Studies: 7.Gov.16, 8.Geo.18,
8.His.9, 8.His.12, 8.His.13, 8.His.14,
AG.BP.9





WATER GUN SONG

DIRECTED BY ANANIAS DIXON

Actors

Jules (Father): Abraham Adams

Sam (Son): Legend Lassiter

A father and son have an important conversation around toy guns, how children of color are perceived and how to stay safe in a world full of inequities.

Standards aligned:

Social & Emotional Learning: C3. 1.c, C3.2.c, C3. 1.d, C3.2.d

Social Studies: 7.Gov.16





KEY TOPICS

Juneteenth

In 1863, The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, declaring that more than 3 million enslaved Blacks living in the Confederate states were to be freed. The legality of slavery was at the heart of the war between the Northern and Southern states, and it took two additional years before the enslaved of Galveston, Texas would learn of their freedom.

On June 19, 1865, the Union Army, under the leadership of General Gordon Granger, arrived at Galveston to share the news that all enslaved people were free. Many enslaved people were aware of the Emancipation Proclamation and that it meant slaves were to be free, but it was not until June 19 that it was enforced by the Union Army. The blending of “June” and “nineteenth” became known as “Juneteenth” and that very day began a tradition of celebrations, sharing of food, parades and community gatherings.

However, not all states in the nation freed enslaved people, even after June 19. The Border States, who had not seceded from the Union and were also not a part of the Confederacy, still maintained slavery. Slavery was officially ended throughout the entire nation by the end of the Civil War and the passage of the 13th Amendment in addition to the Emancipation Proclamation. The 14th and 15th Amendments are notable Reconstruction Amendments for Blacks as they provided citizenship, due process, equal protection and the opportunity to vote and hold office.

In June of 2021, Juneteenth became the newest Federal Holiday since the declaration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day in 1983. It is recognized as a day of remembrance for the end of slavery in America. Long celebrated by Black Americans, Juneteenth is now properly recognized as a day of celebration and remembrance on a national level.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is an unconscious opinion without fairness. Recognizing that these biases exist is the first step to understanding and teaching this topic. Regardless of whether implicit associations are positive or negative, everyone is susceptible to making these judgements. Implicit bias towards others can be seen through stereotyping, making assumptions or having automatic preference. Perception, a mental impression or interpretation, can often be filtered by personal bias to cloud the full and true picture. Biased assumptions are shaped from experiences and upbringing.

For more information on this topic, please watch the interview with expert Kristin Henning in the primer video and read Henning’s book, cited on the Resources page.

Theater and Democracy

Did you know that theater and democracy were developed at the same time in history? The ancient Greeks are cited as creating the first democracy, or rule by the people, in the 5th century B.C.E. The Greeks created theater a bit earlier, around 6th century B.C.E, as both a means of entertainment and civic engagement. They used theater as a tool to discuss current political and philosophical issues to keep their populations informed and engaged.

The Greek Chorus – Acting and moving as one, the role of the Greek Chorus was to reflect back to its citizens questions around morality, ethics and justice.

Direct Democracy – The ancient Greeks had Direct Democracy, meaning that every citizen had a direct vote on the issues at hand.

Representative Democracy – The United States has a Representative Democracy, where we elect officials to act on behalf of our interests.



PRE-SHOW PREPARATIONS

TEACHING THE HARD TOPICS: A CONVERSATION WITH MARK SWAIM-FOX



Mark Swaim-Fox is the Executive Director of the Cleveland branch of Facing History and Ourselves, a nonprofit organization that seeks to “challenge students to reflect on and analyze moral questions and dilemmas that arise during the study of history and literature.”

To learn more about Facing History and Ourselves, please visit facinghistory.org.

Playhouse Square spoke with expert Mark Swaim-Fox on the importance of topics that inspire civic dialogue, complex history in the classroom and his teaching framework.

For those who say we should not talk with students about race or teach about the history of slavery and racism in this country, what would you say to them?

The first thing I would say is that I understand. Talking about things that make us uncomfortable is not something we are necessarily drawn to. That being said, I also know that we as humans and certainly students are innately curious and have a hunger for truth and fairness.

So, as hard as it is to face these events and how we feel about them, we know it is a mistake to avoid talking with young people about what is happening now and in the past. In a way, by not talking to them about these topics, we are not respecting and leaning into their sense of curiosity and truth I mentioned. On top of that, it is dominating public discourse and news coverage. It feels disingenuous not to engage young people in this in a thoughtful way.

Your question makes me think of two quotes from two of my favorite people:

“We cannot have reconciliation without the truth.”
– Bryan Stevenson, Civil Rights Attorney

“American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.”
– James Baldwin, Writer and Civil Rights Activist

How do you explore the complexity of United States history, and what values do you prioritize as you explore this within the classroom?

Such a good question. Our educators put students first, creating classrooms rooted in compassion, respect and understanding. Our lessons are safe, sensitive and constructive. We rely on primary sources to tell the story of history and ask students to consider and discuss with each other essential questions about the choices people made in the past.

Good teaching is about asking questions, not offering dogma. We want students to grapple with hard concepts and come to their own conclusions about our future. We also believe in teaching for complexity. A mentor once told me: “There are no simple solutions to complex problems.” We create classrooms that provide space and don’t shy away from complexity.

What is the pedagogical triangle? How does it ground you within your work?

Facing History and Ourselves has a framework that guides our entire approach to teaching hard history, as well as current events, and we call it our pedagogical triangle. For ourselves, and for our students, we want to engage with any difficult topic through three entry points – our heart, our head, and our conscience.

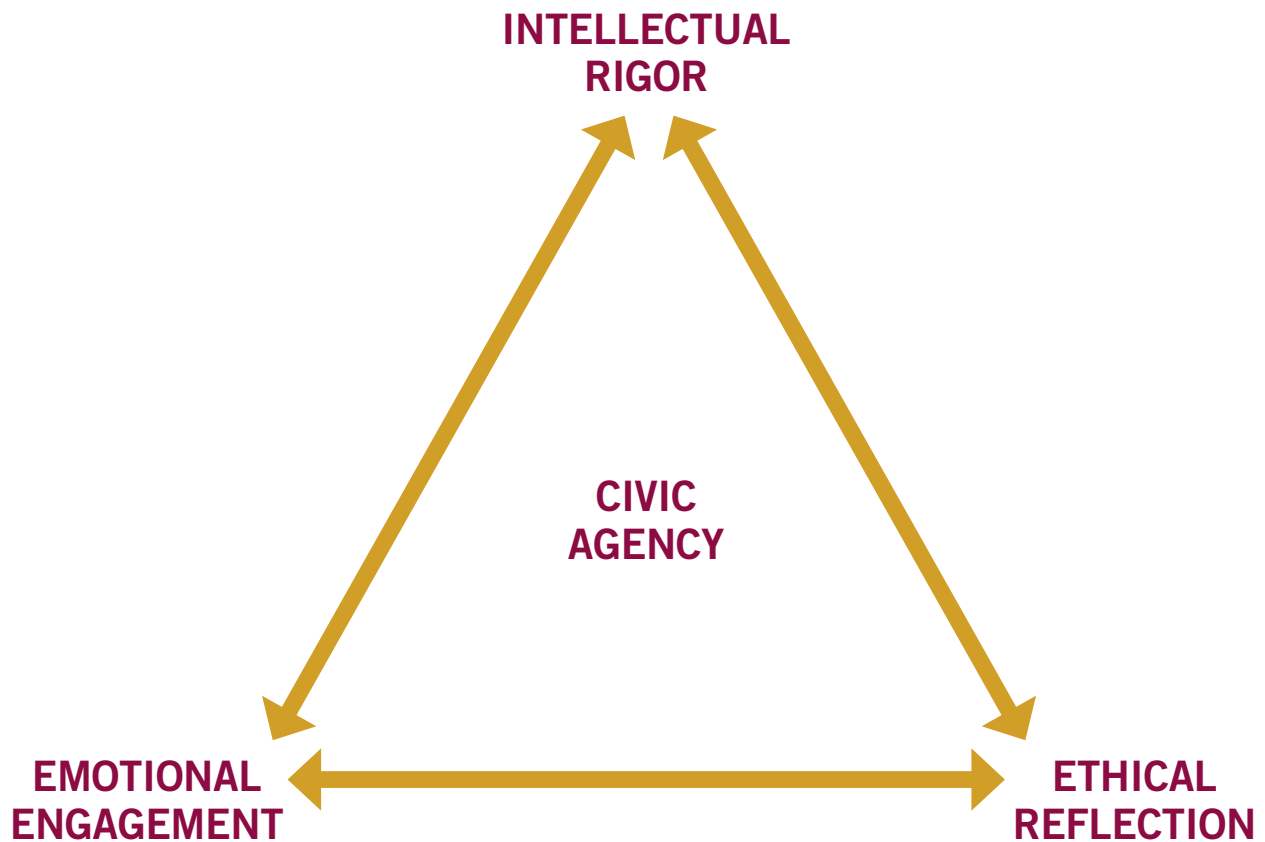
For the heart, that is our emotional engagement: What feelings have been coming up for them as the news continues to unfold? For the head, this is where intellectual rigor is important: What information do they know, and what more do they want to find out? For conscience, this is where we need to lean into ethical



reflection: What questions are we grappling with? How are we navigating the moral complexity of this moment? The first thing we encourage teachers to do is start with themselves on these three points, so they are prepared to then lead students into the conversation.

Once teachers are ready to open the dialogue in their classroom, it is important to first create space for students to reflect independently before discussing with their peers. Then, we have several teaching strategies that support concrete ways of structuring the conversation, to slow down the discussion and allow students to process what they are thinking and feeling as they respond to one another.

As we study the history of our nation through this framework and with these strategies we always come back to the last part of our name – Ourselves. Our teachers ask students to reflect on their learning and thinking about how they want to show up and take responsibility to create a more humane and empathetic future. We call this civic agency. History for the sake of history is meaningless. We use history as a catalyst to help build a healthier and stronger democracy.





Primer Video for Educators



It is highly recommended that all teachers view the primer video.

This informational video resource is intended to prepare teachers for conversations that may be generated through participation in the *Social Justice Shorts* virtual field trip. Playhouse Square teaching artists Ananias and Molly host the video, giving a brief overview of each play and interviewing an expert on the intersection of race, adolescence and policing. They will also introduce a classroom activity to teach active listening and collaboration to students. The Primer Video link and password are listed on the Resources page.

Guest stars:

Kristin Henning is a nationally recognized trainer and consultant on the intersection of race, adolescence, and policing. She is the Blume Professor of Law and Director of the Juvenile Justice Center and Initiative at the Georgetown Law Center. Kristin is also the author of “The Rage of Innocence: How America Criminalizes Black Youth.”



Segments include:

1. Interview with Kristen Henning (starts at 1:55)
2. Classroom Ensemble Building Activity (starts at 5:16)

Run time: 11:21



POST-SHOW ACTIVITY

Classroom Connections Video Workshop for Students (grades 6-12)

The Ohio Learning Standards listed below are addressed in the following Post-Show Activity:

English/Language Arts: SL.6.1, SL.7.1, SL.8.1, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1

Fine Arts: Drama: 8.1CE, III.1CE, IV.2CE, II.2PR, II.5PR

Social & Emotional Learning: A1.3.c, B1.1.c, C1.2.c, C1.3.c, C2.1.c, C3.1.c, C3.2.c, E3.3.c, A1.3.d, A1.4.d, C1.2.d, C1.3.d, C2.1.d, C2.2.d, C2.3.d, C2.4.d, C3.1.d, C3.2.d, C3.3.d, D1.1.d, D3.1.d, E3.3.d

Social Studies: 7.Gov.16, AG.CP.3



Playhouse Square teaching artists Ananias and Molly host a workshop for students to view after the performance videos. They interview the playwright of the pieces, share connections between theater and democracy and present a classroom ensemble building activity. The Post-Show Video link and password are listed on the Resources page.

Guest stars:

Idris Goodwin – *Social Justice Shorts* playwright

Run time: 18:000

Ensemble Building Activity:

Demonstrated in the Primer Video and meant as a post-show exercise for students to connect with each other and build momentum, please follow the instructions below to complete this activity.

1. Clear enough space to make a circle with the class. To adapt for a larger group, break into two or more circles.
2. Make eye contact with others in the circle. Eye contact is crucial to solidifying who is being passed to and helps students remember the details that will be shared such as names and colors.
3. Each person in the circle should step forward, say their name and point to the person they are passing to.
4. Whoever receives the pass turns to another person and passes their own name to them. Tips: Have the students pass to someone across the circle rather than someone directly next to them. Make sure that everyone has a turn. Try to maintain a consistent beat when speaking and passing. The added challenge of keeping a beat raises the stakes of the game.
5. Go around the circle a few times.
6. Choose someone to call out the switch in directions starting with saying your own name, then the name of the person you are passing to, your chosen color, and lastly the chosen color of the person you are passing to. The calling person would shout YOUR NAME, THEIR NAME, YOUR COLOR, or THEIR COLOR to switch the directions between rounds.
7. Don't forget to have fun!

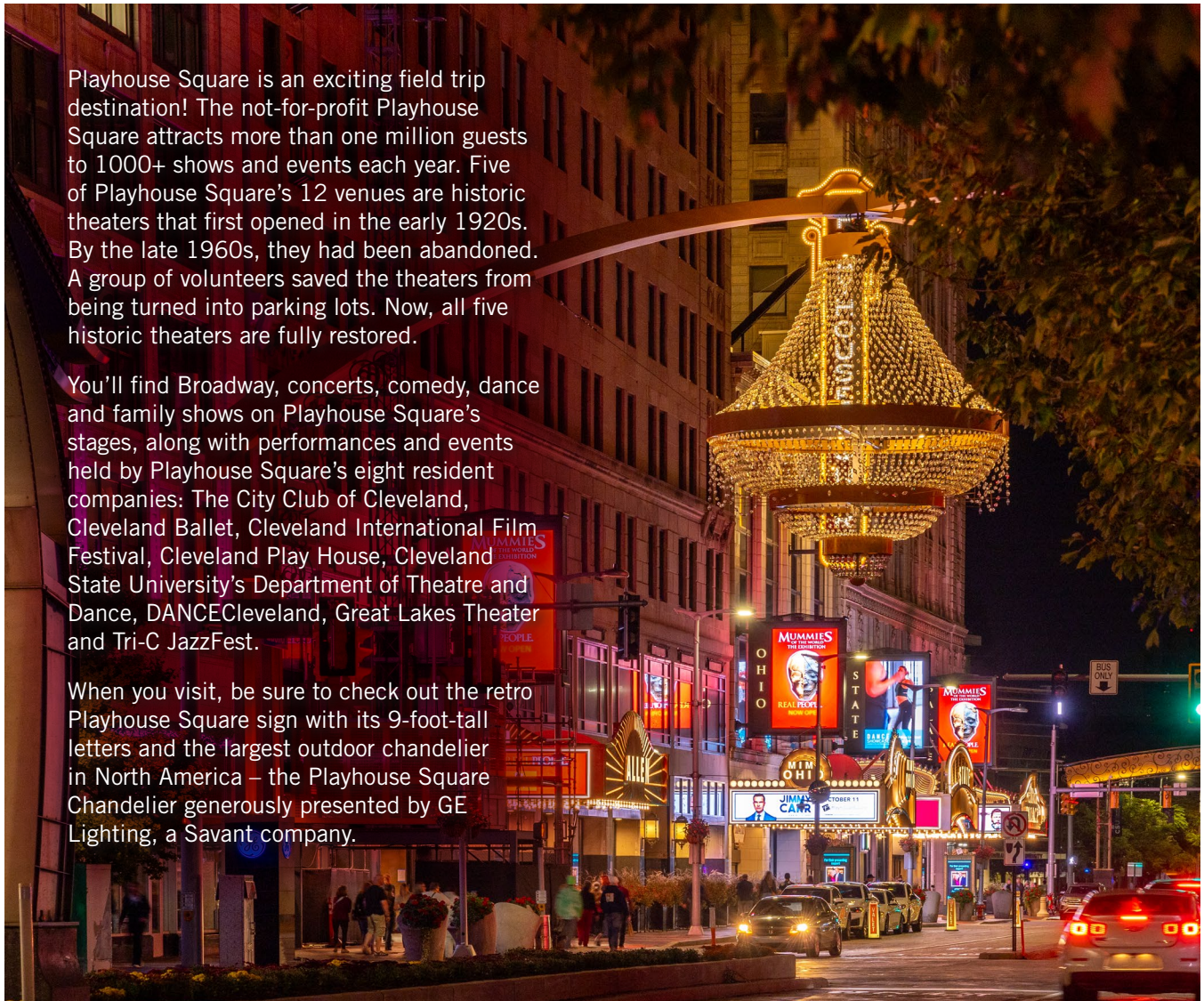


ABOUT PLAYHOUSE SQUARE

Playhouse Square is an exciting field trip destination! The not-for-profit Playhouse Square attracts more than one million guests to 1000+ shows and events each year. Five of Playhouse Square's 12 venues are historic theaters that first opened in the early 1920s. By the late 1960s, they had been abandoned. A group of volunteers saved the theaters from being turned into parking lots. Now, all five historic theaters are fully restored.

You'll find Broadway, concerts, comedy, dance and family shows on Playhouse Square's stages, along with performances and events held by Playhouse Square's eight resident companies: The City Club of Cleveland, Cleveland Ballet, Cleveland International Film Festival, Cleveland Play House, Cleveland State University's Department of Theatre and Dance, DANCECleveland, Great Lakes Theater and Tri-C JazzFest.

When you visit, be sure to check out the retro Playhouse Square sign with its 9-foot-tall letters and the largest outdoor chandelier in North America – the Playhouse Square Chandelier generously presented by GE Lighting, a Savant company.



This primer packet is intended as supplemental written information for educators to pair with the *Social Justice Shorts* virtual field trip experience.

SOCIAL JUSTICE SERIES

Playhouse Square is committed to fighting systemic racism in the community. As a part of that commitment, this performance, along with others in the series, explore the issues faced as a community and a nation through the perspectives of outstanding artists of color.



The Ohio Arts Council helps fund this organization with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans.

Playhouse Square is supported in part by the residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture.



RESOURCES

BOOKS



The Emotional Lives of Teenagers by Lisa Damour, PhD

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas

The Rage of Innocence: How America Criminalizes Black Youth by Kristin Henning

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Classroom Connections Video Workshops

Social Justice Shorts Primer Video. Password: shorts240219 <https://vimeo.com/showcase/10862051/video/894975720>

Social Justice Shorts Post-Show Video. Password: shorts240219 <https://vimeo.com/showcase/10862051/video/894974350>

WEB



Classroom Resources, *Learning for Justice*, <https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources>

“Episode 72: How Do We Talk to Kids about Justice?” Advice from Preet Bharara, *Ask Lisa* podcast, Spotify, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/4KcbSHH5jK4Z9WwRRKIDdC>

Juneteenth Digital Toolkit, *National Museum of African American History & Culture*, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/juneteenth-digital-toolkit>

“Meditation for Body Peace – Rising Youth Theatre workshop for Youth Conference for Social Justice,” *Rising Youth Theatre*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWJDI5R_O38

“The Emotional Lives of Teenagers” Discussion Guide for Educators, *Lisa Damour, PhD*, <https://drlisadamour.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FINAL-discussion-guide-for-educators.pdf>

“Understanding Implicit Bias” by Cheryl Staats, *The American Federation of Teachers*, https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ae_winter2015staats.pdf