

Alliance Theatre

institute

A Finger-Licking Good Dramaturgical Study Guide

Created as part of the Alliance Theatre's Dramaturgy by Students program
by: Avery Sharpe, Teaching Artist
with: T. Walker Scott's Drama Ensemble, DeKalb School of the Arts



The Hot Wing King

Written and Directed by P-Valley creator, Katori Hall

February 10 – March 5, 2023

Coca-Cola Stage

Recommended for ages 14+

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*Pictured: the Studio Theatre's production of The Hot Wing King
Summer 2022 in Washington, DC*

Ingredients:

Georgia Standards of Excellence

English Language Arts

- ELAGSE9-10RL3: Analyze how complex characters(e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
- ELAGSE9-10RL4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone.)
- ELAGSE11-12RL4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
- ELAGSE11-12RL5: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
- ELAGSE11-12RL6: Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

Theatre

- TAHS.A.CN.2 Examine the role of theatre in a societal, cultural, and historical context.
 - a. Examine and apply theatrical theories, performances, and conventions from a variety of theatrical literature, historical periods, and cultures.
- TAHSFT.CN.1 Explore how theatre connects to life experiences, careers, and other content.
 - a. Examine how theatre reflects real life.

Social Studies

- SSSocC1 Explain the development and importance of culture.
 - a. Describe how culture is a social construction.
 - b. Identify the basic elements of culture.
 - c. Explain the importance of culture as an organizing tool in society.
 - d. Describe the components of culture to include language, symbols, norms, and values; also include material and non-material culture.
- SSSocC3 Analyze social structure and interaction within society.
 - a. Explain the components of social structure, include: status, role and social institutions.

The Venue



On the Alliance Theatre's Coca-Cola Stage



*Pictured: The Alliance Theatre's production of Maybe Happy Ending
January – February 2020, Coca-Cola Stage*

“The Coca-Cola Stage at the Alliance Theatre has been transformed, demonstrating what is possible when a multi-disciplinary team works in concert. Perfectly tuned acoustically to deliver world-class performances to its patrons, the project also moved the 650-foot chamber 10 feet closer to the stage and challenged historic notions of segregation and discrimination by removing the separation between the balcony and orchestra. As an additional unifying feature, all seating zones are accessible from every entrance within the chamber.”

—American Institute of Architects

The Executive Chef: Playwright & Director



Katori Hall is a Pulitzer Prize and Olivier Award-winning playwright and television creator/producer hailing from Memphis, Tennessee. A two-time Tony Award nominee, she won the 2021 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for her play, *The Hot Wing King*, which she will soon direct for the first time at Atlanta's Alliance Theatre in early 2023.

She is currently the showrunner and Executive Producer of the Starz drama series, *P-Valley*, which she adapted from her stage play *Pussy Valley*. The critically acclaimed and record-breaking series returned for its second season on June 3, 2022. *P-Valley* was named to countless 'Best of 2020' lists for its first season and, among many honors, has received Gotham, Independent Spirit, GLAAD Media, and NAACP Image Award nominations. Katori recently signed an overall deal with Lionsgate Television to continue to develop and produce groundbreaking content across their linear and streaming platforms.

For Broadway, she most recently wrote and produced the hit musical, *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*, based on the life of the iconic performer, receiving two Tony Award nominations for her work as both playwright for 'Best Book of a Musical' and as producer in the 'Best Musical' category. For the musical's acclaimed West End production, she also received an Olivier nomination for 'Best New Musical.'

Her play *The Mountaintop*, which vividly reimagines the final night of Martin Luther King Jr.'s life, premiered at Theatre503 in London in 2009, then transferred to the West End, where she won the Olivier Award for Best New Play in 2010. It later opened on Broadway in October 2011 to critical acclaim in a production starring Samuel L. Jackson and Angela Bassett. *The Mountaintop* will soon premiere at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles from June 6 – July 9, 2023.

Source: <https://www.katorihall.com/>

Learn more: <https://bittersoutherner.com/feature/2022/katori-hall-truth-in-fiction>



Photo Source: freepik.com

Appetizers:

Pre-Show Questions

1. What hobby or pastime makes you feel most competitive?
2. How do you define “family”? Why?
3. What constitutes a “good” chicken wing, in your opinion?
4. What are your (3) favorite slang words or memes? Why?
5. Can food really bring people together? Why?

Dessert:

Post-Show Questions

1. Which relationships changed most throughout the play?
2. How do you define “family”? Has your answer changed?
3. Which songs/artists make you feel nostalgic for “home”?
4. Why do you think Katori Hall created this play? What’s the point/big idea/message?
5. Did this play challenge any of your previously held opinions or beliefs?

The Sampler: Synopsis & Setting



So here's how they tell it (in our own words)... in the bustling city of Memphis, Tennessee, Cordell Crutchfield, Big Charles, Isom, and Dwayne make up the cooking team known as the "New Wing Order (NWO)." Together, they are determined to win the annual Hot Wang Festival and whoever contributes the most to their success will be given the coveted honor of being crowned the Hot Wing King. However, between Cordell and Dwayne's relationship drama, Dwayne's nephew Everett looking for a place to stay, and the competition on the horizon... things are heating up and it might force everyone to get out of the kitchen.

Learn more: <https://www.alliancetheatre.org/production/2022-23/the-hot-wing-king>



Memphis is historically one of the American South's hotspots for black culture. Home to some of the most famous BBQ in the world, Memphis hosts one of the premiere hot wing festivals around.

The Cooking Kings: Characters



*Photo: Signature Theatre's production of The Hot Wing King
Winter 2020; New York*

CORDELL is a freshly out gay man who's getting a divorce from his wife and has recently moved in with his beau Dwayne. He's looking forward to the Hot Wang festival and is the resident lead member of the New Wing Order.

DWAYNE is the uncle of Everett, brother-in-law of TJ, and beau of Cordell. He owns the house that serves as NWO's headquarters and is one of the leading members. He's a singer and pianist that strongly values family. In a series of devastating events, his sister was killed, and he feels responsible for it, which also puts a strain on his relationship with TJ.

ISOM is a vibrant gay man who has recently joined the NWO. He is a spiritual individual who met the rest of the New Wing Order at church, and he may or may not have something going on with Big Charles.

BIG CHARLES owns the barber shop where Dwayne and Cordell met and has been friends with them ever since. He is a proud member of the New Wing Order and has an affinity for sports. He may or may not have something going on with Isom.



EVERETT (EJ) is TJ's 16-year-old son and Dwayne's wayward nephew who seems to be in need of a fatherly figure. Because of unreliable parenting, he has often had to make a way for himself, which has been a source of stress for Dwayne and a point of tension for Cordell and Dwayne's relationship.

TJ is Everett's non-present father figure and Dwayne's brother-in-law. He's about the street life, and hasn't been responsible in teaching his son the lessons he needs to learn to be successful in adulthood. He has struggled since his wife's murder.

Words Al Dente: Featured Vocabulary & Allusions

Directions: These words were new or important to us and are intended to add texture and flavor to your overall enjoyment of the play.

Disclaimer: This information may or may not cause learning.

Word or Allusion	Definition or Description
Aretha Franklin 	An extremely prominent African American singer and pianist known as the “Queen of Soul”
Banya	Type of Russian sauna
Chirrun	Children
Chitlins 	The small intestines of domestic animals, cooked and eaten typically as Soul Food in the United States
Cool Water	A cologne
Couth	Smooth, having sophistication
Crunk	Very excited and full of energy
Caboodle	A container that folds out; normally used for containing makeup
English breakfast	A popular type of “tea”; in this case slang for
Framily	When friends become like family, and may even know you better than your family
Fucci Murse	A handbag for men that imitates the look of bags made by Gucci
Homo-thug	A person who identifies as both homosexual and thug

Words Al Dente: Featured Vocabulary & Allusions

Continued

Word or Allusion	Definition or Description
<p style="text-align: center;">LaTavia and Farrah</p> 	<p>Female singers from the 90s R&B group Destiny's Child</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Luther Vandross</p> 	<p>An R&B artist who was popular in the 80s; he was gay, but was never public about it during his lifetime</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">New Edition</p> 	<p>R&B group from the 90s</p>
<p>NOLA</p>	<p>Abbreviation for New Orleans, Louisiana</p>
<p>Pronator quadratus</p>	<p>A thin, flat muscle on the forearm</p>
<p>The D&P</p>	<p>Slang expression referring to the penis and vagina</p>
<p>Team Coochie</p>	<p>Slang expression referring to being straight</p>

The Flavor Profile: Themes and Motifs

Blackness is seen in the food, songs, slang, and the sense of community. They are all black and bond over that with cultural references in songs, celebrities, brands, etc. Even in the stage directions of this play, the vernacular and references are clearly from black culture.

Queerness is a big focus in this show as it mostly revolves around gay men and their relationships with each other. However, this play also shows how men of different orientations interact with each other, and it explores the spectrum of sexual identity and expression. Again, even in the stage directions, there's a lot of terminology and allusions specific to queer culture.

Found family is the people you've chosen to surround yourself with. Everyone featured in this play is a part of each other's chosen family. Most of the men in the show weren't accepted as they were within their own families and found a new family to thrive with.

Fatherhood is seen throughout the show in a variety of ways. We see TJ and EJ's relationship as well as Cordell's harsh relationship with his two sons. We see how fatherhood can change depending on circumstances. Dwayne also begins his journey to fatherhood as EJ decides to move into his and Cordell's home.

Competition culture is even baked into the title of the show. "Hot Wing King" refers to the hot wing competition which occurs at the end of the show. Becoming the hot wing king is the goal the characters are most vocal about. There is also competition between TJ and Dwayne over EJ's living.

Guilt and regret affect all of these men in one way or another. Death, police brutality, loss, street life, lack of safety, past bad choices, etc. Dwayne calling the police, Cordell's relationship with his kids, and TJ's relationship with Everett are just a few examples.

Police brutality is seen through Everett's mom's murder after what was supposed to be a call to help her. Instead of getting help, she was shot and killed.

Class in America is broken into different economic/social classes that tend to define who they're surrounded by and where they live. In the show, we see the economic and social difference between TJ and Dwayne as family members. Dwayne lives in a nice house and hangs out with other like-minded people while TJ lives in a small apartment and is a drug dealer.

The Lobby Playlist: Music

Directions: Since music is such a big part of this show, we came up with some songs inspired by *Hot Wing King*. How many did you already know?



Photo: Lil Nas X

Songs fresh from *Hot Wing King*

- ♥ Never Too Much by Luther Vandross
- ♥ Giving Up by Donny Hathaway
- ♥ A House is Not a Home by Luther Vandross

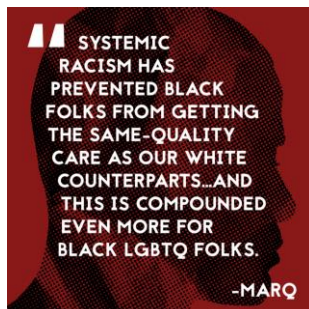
Hot-Hot and HOT Hits from the 80's

- ♥ It's Raining Men by The Weather Girls
- ♥ Le Freak by Chic
- ♥ Pull Up to the Bumper by Grace Jones
- ♥ Elements of Vogue by David Ian Xtravaganza
- ♥ Power of Love by Luther Vandross

Modern Money-Maker Shakers

- ♥ Montero by Lil Nas X
- ♥ Q.U.E.E.N. by Janelle Monáe
- ♥ Alien Superstar by Beyoncé
- ♥ Kill My Heart by VINCINT
- ♥ Love is a State of Mind by Honey Dijon

The Walk-In: Thematic Deep Dive



LGBTQ+ History

References are made throughout the show to masculinity and connecting that theme to being a gay man, specifically a black gay man. For example, Cordell has recently come out after being married to a woman for many years, and even having kids with her. We see some code shifting when he interacts with EJ, who is a straight man. We can understand characters in *The Hot Wing King*, especially Cordell, by understanding LGBTQ+ history through the perspective of the black community.



Photo: Marsha P. Johnson, queer rights activist whose death was officially ruled a suicide, but is widely thought to have been murder for activism

Racism in the Queer Community

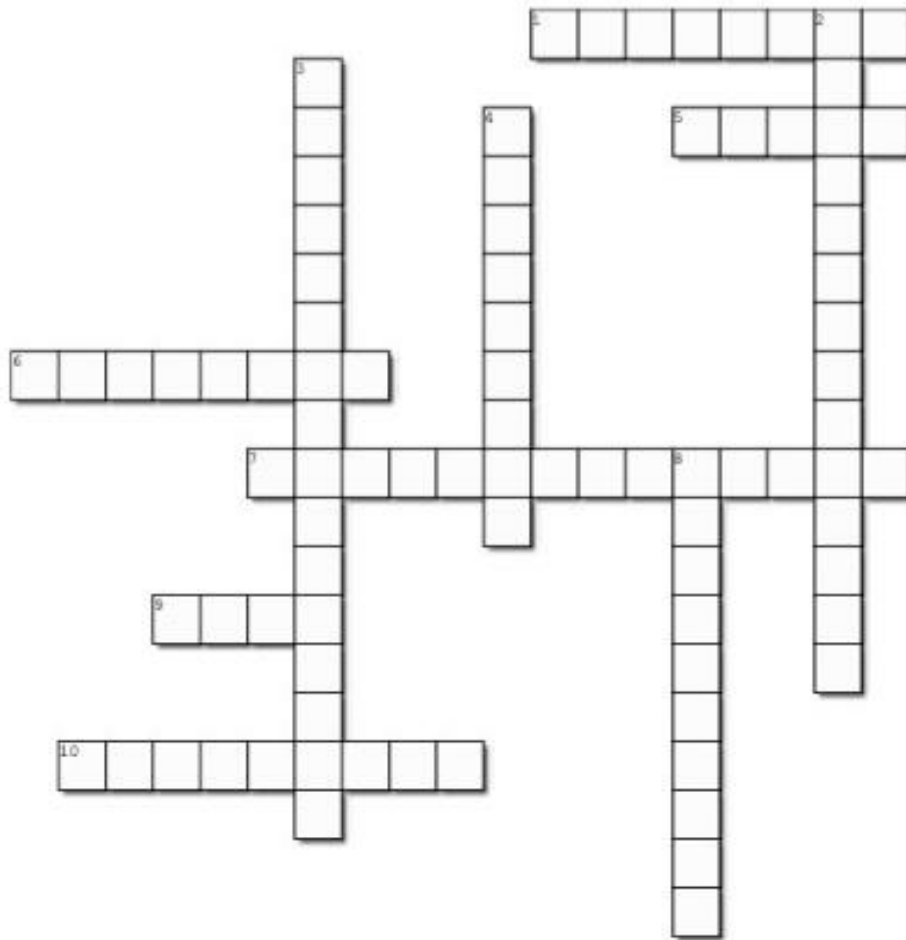
The queer community is known as accepting and kind; however, there are many accounts of queer black people feeling rejected from both the black and queer communities, respectively. Statistically, 40% of black LGBTQ+ individuals report avoiding law enforcement to avoid experiencing discrimination while 28% of white LGBTQ+ respondents reported the same. Additionally, in the workplace, black queer people report altering their behavior to not appear “too gay” or “too black” in order to avoid harassment.

In this show, the representation of black gay men forming a chosen family can be seen as an escape from the oppression from both sides of their identity. Looking at the members of the New Wing Order while understanding the racial climate of the queer community brings a new perspective to their group dynamics.

The Crosswing King: A Puzzle

Crosswing King

Be the first to successfully fill out all the words and be crowned the king



Created using the Crossword Maker on TheTeachersCorner.net

Across

1. The spicy secret to the Cordell Crutchfield recipe
5. Cordell's preferred cut of chicken wings
6. A wool taken from goats that TJ seemed to enjoy quite a lot
7. The experimental wings created by Cordell using pink Himalayan salt
9. What Dwayne pours into his eyes to try to help with the heat
10. The wings accidentally created by Big Charles that ended up being great

Down

2. The artist who sings 'Never Too Much'
3. Cordell's preferred stirring direction
4. The mascot of Memphis's NBA team
8. The place where Cordell and Dwayne met

Works Cited

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