

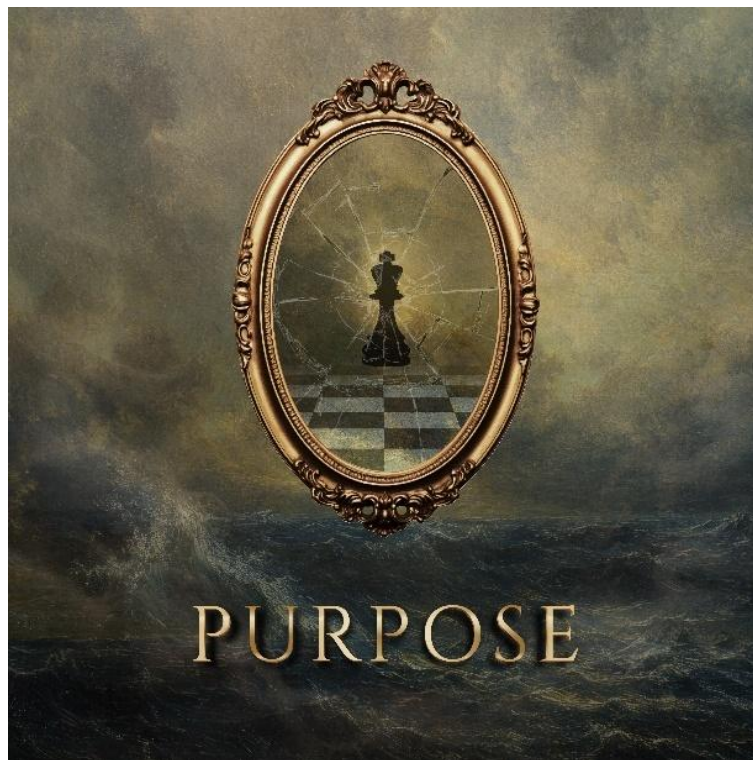
Alliance Theatre

institute

Dramaturgy Resource Guide

Purpose

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By Branden Jacobs-Jenkins
Directed by Keith Arthur Bolden
A co-production with McCarter Theatre Center

August 28 – September 20, 2026
Alliance Theatre, Coca-Cola Stage

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Content Advisory:

Contains some explicit language; depicts drinking and suicide ideation and attempt; addresses topics including race, incarceration, neurodivergence, mental health, sexuality, and reproduction

Georgia Standards of Excellence

Source: <https://case.georgiastandards.org/>

English Language Arts

11.P.AC.1 Interpret texts through the author's lens by identifying, analyzing, and evaluating craft techniques that are connected to the responses, thoughts, decisions, and questions triggered by the text.

b. Identify, apply, and analyze important, interesting, or effective uses of language, explaining or evaluating how specific word choices affect the target audience and support the text's purpose.

d. Describe, analyze, and evaluate the design and organization of the text, explaining how specific formats, structures, patterns, and features influence the audience, contribute to the text's accessibility, and support the text's purpose.

12.T.PM V. Movements Students demonstrate knowledge of dominant themes, genres, and verbal styles of literature from a particular time period.

Dramatic Writing

TAHSTL.RE.1 Evaluate various aspects of dramatic arts literature using appropriate supporting evidence.

e. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

Theater

TAHSAD.RE.1 Engage actively and appropriately as an audience member.

a. Examine the relationship between actor and live audience in history and contemporary performance.

Social Studies – Psychology

SSPBF3 Discuss the components of stress.

a. Categorize and explain the different physiological and psychological reactions to stress.

SSPBC3 Describe behavioral, social, and cognitive changes from the prenatal period throughout life span.

a. Chart physical changes of a human being from conception through late adulthood.

SSPVB3 Identify psychological disorders and treatment.

c. Analyze various psychological disorders and identify appropriate treatments, include: anxiety disorders, bipolar and depressive disorders, personality disorders, somatic disorders, and schizophrenia.

Social Studies – Sociology

SSSocC3 Analyze social structure and interaction within society.

a. Explain the components of social structure, include: status, role and social institutions.

d. Analyze the components, varieties, and functions of group dynamics, include: such factors as group size, leadership and authority, and such processes as bystander effect and groupthink.

Social Studies – United States History

SSUSH21 Analyze U.S. international and domestic policies including their influences on technological advancements and social changes during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations

d. Investigate the growth, influence, and tactics of civil rights groups, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Letter from Birmingham Jail, the I Have a Dream Speech, and Cesar Chavez.

Synopsis

In Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' Tony Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning play, the Jasper family is gathering for a long-overdue reunion. For decades, they've been the embodiment of Black political power and public virtue – a dynasty of ministers, activists, and changemakers whose legacy has shaped generations. But when a young outsider arrives with questions no one is prepared to answer, carefully guarded secrets begin to surface.

Over the course of one unforgettable evening, old wounds reopen, loyalties are tested, and the truth threatens to upend everything the family has built. At once biting, hilarious, and deeply human, *Purpose* asks what we owe our families, our communities, and ourselves.



Photo by: Casey Gardner Ford

About the Playwright

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins is a Tony Award-winning and Pulitzer Prize for Drama-winning playwright based in Brooklyn, New York. He is a Professor in the Practice of Theater and Performance Studies at Yale University and serves as Vice President of the Dramatists Guild council. Previous work includes *Everybody* (Signature Theatre; Pulitzer Prize finalist), *An Octoroon* (Soho Rep.; OBIE Award), and *Neighbors* (The Public Theater).



Photo by: Gregory Costanzo (Vogue)

Character Descriptions

SOLOMON JASPER [Father | Reverend | Civil Rights Leader]

The patriarch of the Jasper family, Solomon Jasper is a respected minister and veteran of the Civil Rights Movement. Nazareth describes his father as an important but “undersung” orator who spent much of his life preaching, speaking publicly, and moving among significant political and religious figures. He comes from generations of pastors and once expected his youngest son, Nazareth, to continue that tradition.

Now approaching a different stage of his life, Solomon is confronting questions about his faith, his legacy, and the choices his sons have made. His expectations for his children—and particularly his ideas about responsibility, truth, and purpose—place him at the center of many of the family’s conflicts.

CLAUDINE JASPER [Mother | Matriarch | Keeper of the Family]

Claudine Jasper is the formidable matriarch holding the Jasper family together. Intelligent, elegant, deeply religious, and fiercely protective of her family, Claudine has spent much of her life supporting Solomon’s public career while managing the private world of their household.

Claudine believes strongly in family, tradition, and togetherness. She worries about her children’s futures and wants Nazareth, in particular, to find a partner and build a family of his own. But her devotion is more complicated than simple maternal concern. As the play progresses, we see just how much energy Claudine has devoted to protecting the Jasper family and preserving the people—and legacy—she loves.

NAZARETH JASPER [Youngest Son | Nature Photographer | Narrator]

Nazareth, often called Naz, is the Jasper family’s youngest son and our primary guide into the story. Rather than following the path his father envisioned for him, Nazareth left divinity school shortly before completing his degree and eventually became a nature photographer.

Thoughtful, private, observant, and sometimes uncomfortable with his family’s prominence, Nazareth has chosen a life very different from those of his father and older brother. His departure from divinity school remains a source of tension with Solomon, who had expected him to continue the family’s ministerial tradition.

Because Nazareth frequently speaks directly to the audience, we experience much of the Jasper family through his memories, interpretations, humor, and evolving understanding of the people around him.

Character Descriptions

Continued

SOLOMON “JUNIOR” JASPER JR. [Oldest Son | Former State Senator | Morgan’s Husband]

The Jasper family’s eldest son, Junior, followed his father into public life—but through politics rather than ministry. A former state senator, Junior returns to the family home after serving 24 months of a 30-month prison sentence following convictions for embezzling campaign funds and wire fraud.

Junior initially appears energetic and optimistic, continually looking for a way to turn his public downfall into another chapter of his life. Beneath that confidence, however, is a man struggling with enormous expectations: those attached to his family name, his marriage, his public identity, and his own understanding of who he is. His relationship with his father becomes particularly important as Junior searches for a sense of identity beyond the Jasper legacy.

MORGAN JASPER [Junior’s Wife | Mother | Outsider Within the Family]

Morgan is Junior’s wife and the mother of their twin boys. Although she married into one of the country’s prominent Black families, Morgan’s relationship with the Jasper legacy is far more complicated than it initially appears.

Morgan describes growing up in a much different environment from the Jaspers. Her mother moved their family to Maryland seeking a different life, and Morgan remembers coming from a working-class background. After marrying Junior, she became part of what others could view as a successful Black “power couple.” But Morgan gradually came to question whether she was being valued as a complete person or as another symbol within the family’s carefully constructed public image.

Her perspective challenges the family’s understanding of itself and asks audiences to consider the difference between public achievement and private reality.

AZIZA HOUSTON [Nazareth’s Friend | Social Worker | Harlem Native]

Aziza Houston is Nazareth’s friend and former neighbor. The two became close while living in Harlem during the pandemic, and Aziza was one of the first people to encourage Nazareth to take his photography seriously as a profession.

Warm, perceptive, outspoken, and empathetic, Aziza enters the Jasper household as someone outside the immediate family. She is also impressed by Solomon’s history and initially finds herself somewhat starstruck by the famous civil rights figure.

But Aziza isn’t simply an observer. She has a degree in social work, and when an uncomfortable family discussion turns toward Nazareth’s identity, she is willing to speak up in support of her friend. Her position as both guest and outsider allows her—and the audience—to see the Jasper family from a perspective its members cannot always see themselves.

Purpose – Character Analysis

Choose a character from Purpose and fill in the blanks below

Character

Character Traits <i>What words describe this character? What actions, dialogue, or choices support your ideas?</i>	Obstacles <i>What stands in the character's way? Consider people, circumstances, expectations, and internal conflicts.</i>
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Purpose <i>What does this character want? What seems to give them direction, meaning, or motivation?</i>
--

Text / Performance Evidence <i>Describe what was said, an action, moment, or staging choice that helps explain your analysis.</i>

Setting

Chicago, Illinois



Purpose takes place in the Jasper family home, in Chicago, Illinois. Chicago feels like an intentional choice by the playwright because it is a place with a legacy of Black excellence, complex politics, strong family and community ties.

Chicago, the “Second City”, is one of the largest and most influential cities in the United States. Located on the shores of Lake Michigan, it is a major center for commerce, education, politics, and culture. Founded in 1837, Chicago grew rapidly. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries because of its strategic location, railroads, and industrial economy.

Today it is known for its architecture, diverse neighborhoods, world-class museums, and deep musical and artistic traditions (“Chicago”).

Chicago was a vital destination during the Great Migration, when millions of African Americans moved from the rural South seeking opportunity and freedom in Northern cities. Neighborhoods on the south side became centers of black life, faith, business, and political leadership. Since then, Chicago has produced powerful voices in politics, religion, literature, music and the arts including Maynard Jackson, Michelle Obama, Gwendolyn Brooks, and many more (“Chicago and the Great Migration”).

For the Jasper family, Chicago is a home in which the family gathers, debates, and makes decisions. The city’s history of political activism, faith communities, and Black leadership mirrors themes in *Purpose* including legacy, responsibility, and the weight of influence.

Niagara Falls



Niagara Falls is one of the most famous natural wonders in the world. Straddling the border between the United States and Canada, the falls are made up of three waterfalls: Horseshoe Falls (primarily in Ontario), American Falls, and Bridal Veil Falls (National Park Service). The natural beauty and power of the falls have drawn visitors for centuries and make the area a hub for tourism, honeymoon travel, and inspiration for artists and photographers.

The region also has a long history of industry and innovation, including early hydroelectric power development that harnessed the falls’ energy. Today, Niagara Falls is a symbol of both natural majesty and human ingenuity (National Park Service).

In the play, Nazareth wakes up in a hotel room with an amazing view of the falls during a brief stop on his journey home after a photography assignment in Ontario. It is a liminal space between countries, between work and family, that marks a turning point in his story,

Setting

Continued

Harlem, New York

Harlem, in Upper Manhattan, has long been a central neighborhood for Black culture, history and community. In the early 20th century, the Harlem Renaissance made the area a global center for Black art, literature, music, and intellectual life with pioneers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, and Duke Ellington shaping American culture (National Museum of African American History and Culture).

Harlem has also been a hub for civil rights activism, churches, schools, and small businesses that support and uplift Black families across generations. It's rich heritage of creativity, resilience and community continues today through its institution, art, and people (NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission).

Aziza is born and raised in Harlem. Her experiences growing up in this historic neighborhood inform who she is, her values, humor strength and deep sense of care for others. Harlem is also where Aziza and Nazareth became friends during the pandemic.



Set Design at Alliance Theatre by: Sotirios Livaditis

Vocabulary

In order of appearance

ACT I

Word (Part of Speech)	Definition	Used in Context
Consumable (adjective)	Capable of taking in – in great quantity	"Lakes that were completely consumable in one sitting."
Adjacent (adjective)	Sharing a common border, next to or nearby	"... we were talking nearly every day, first on our adjacent balconies..."
Shrine (noun)	A display or place of sacred relics, in which devotion is paid	"Somewhere prominent is a large painting of Martin Luther King, Jr - a borderline shrine."
Indisposed (adjective)	Unavailable or absent (a polite excuse without a specific reason)	"I was obviously indisposed."
Piéd à terre (noun)	A temporary or second lodging	"...if not exactly a house of God, at least his piéd à terre."
Orator (noun)	A skillful and powerful public speaker	"...one of the most undersung orators of his time..."
Prospering (verb)	To become strong and flourish	"They are not growing and prospering!"
Associates (verb, plural)	Partners, friends, or companions	"I'm either Claudine or Mother Jasper to my children's associates."
Tizzy (noun)	A highly excited and distracted state of mind	"It was funny seeing my father like this - in such a... tizzy..."
Discreet (adjective)	Showing good judgment, caution and prudence	"Um... Naz is just a... private dude. Discreet."
Instinctively (adverb)	Following a natural propensity	"Those bees seemed to trust him instinctively..."
Endured (verb, past tense)	Remained firm under suffering or misfortune	"Junior, I want you to know that we see what you have endured and we celebrate you..."
Compelled (verb)	Urged forcefully or irresistibly	"I... feel compelled to confirm Nazareth's statement here."
Tethered (verb)	A line that attaches one thing to another (for security)	"...two things that kept me tethered to the light."
Pivot (noun)	A strategic change made to adapt or improve	"All Hail the King of the Pivot."
Contrite (adjective)	Feeling or showing remorse	"...I am very contrite and I have much to atone for, even still."
Atone (verb)	To make amends	
Slack (noun)	An expression that comes from sailing – slack is loose, hanging rope	"I am picking up your slack, Claudine!"

Vocabulary

Continued, in order of appearance

ACT II

Word (Part of Speech)	Definition	Used in Context
Corroborating (adjective)	Proven and certain, able to verify	"...the only other corroborating witness..."
Manipulative (adjective)	Intending to control or influence others in a deceptive, unfair, or selfish way	"...I'd never imagined her to be so...manipulative in this way."
Charismatic (adjective)	Possessing traits that attract, inspire, or fascinate others	"Having the father I had - so charismatic and outgoing - didn't exactly help."
Ordeal (noun)	A severe trial or experience	"It was a whole ordeal."
Litigious (adjective)	Prone to dispute and engage in a lawsuit	"...Morgan is preparing to get litigious..."
Delusions (noun, plural)	False ideas or beliefs	"I will not tolerate such delusions that people are ill when they are not.:"
Transgressions (noun, plural)	Violations	"...own up to my own... transgressions."
Bane (noun)	A source of harm, a curse	"She was the one I couldn't make go away. Bane of my existence..."
Seductive (adjective)	Alluring or tempting	"You Jaspers are a very seductive bunch."
Defrauded (verb, past tense)	Deprived of something through deception	"...I can prove I was defrauded here and you know I was."
Feted (verb, past tense)	To be paid a high honor, celebrated	"I still feel like I haven't been properly feted..."
Redeem (verb)	To release from blame, repair, or restore	"I am begging you to give us a chance to redeem ourselves after that circus last night."
Pro Bono (adjective)	Donated (free) professional work, often legal	"Which of course I could help you write - pro bono..."
Viable (adjective)	Capable, possible of working adequately	"Then why is he no longer a viable candidate for you?"
Fleeting (adjective)	Passing swiftly, transitory	"...this flip world of fleeting, arbitrary opinions..."
Arbitrary (adjective)	Decided randomly, on a whim	
Adhere (verb)	To maintain loyally, to stick to	"...adhere to some version of these rules."
Namesake (noun)	A person who is named after another	"My namesake, he would forge the path..."
Conviction (noun)	A strong persuasion or belief	"... sign of holiness and religious conviction"

Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

Vocabulary Activity

Context Clues, Synonyms & Word Choice

Directions:

1. Read each passage, looking for context clues that point to the meaning – or definition – of each underlined word.
2. Brainstorm 2-3 synonyms the playwright may have considered.
3. Contemplate why the playwright selected this specific word – what effect does it have?

Passage 1: Act 1, Scene 1 (page 3)		
(stage directions) The walls are hung with family portraits through the ages, clustered together in little groups; some somewhat <u>vintage</u> editorial-looking photographs of our <u>patriarch</u> Solomon Jasper behind various podiums or shaking hands with various <u>dignitaries</u> of yon; and a smattering of "black art," mostly in a realist mode.		
Word	Synonyms	Effect
vintage		
patriarch		
dignitaries		

Passage 2: Act 1, Scene 1 (page 9)		
NAZARETH (to audience) My mother, Claudine Jasper - a walking example of a First Lady, despite my father never having a proper church to First. His, uh, sort of celebrity back in the day turned him into a kind of <u>itinerant</u> preacher, too busy with TV appearances and <u>glad-handing</u> dignitaries to dedicate himself to just one pulpit. Any audience he could find - or found him, I guess - was his <u>flock</u> to shepherd.		
Word	Synonyms	Effect
itinerant		
glad-handing		
flock		

Vocabulary Activity

Context Clues, Synonyms & Word Choice, continued

Passage 3: Act 2, Scene 1 (page 53)		
NAZARETH So you have to imagine the shock I felt watching my mother <u>pop</u> my sister-in-law across the face like that. I had never seen my mother strike another person - let alone woman - in my life. But I had also never seen Morgan so <u>out of pocket</u>, touching every <u>third rail</u> in sight - not the least of which involving an infamous video which had appeared online many years prior to this evening.		
Word	Synonyms	Effect
pop		
out of pocket		
third rail		

Passage 4: Act 2, Scene 2 (page 84)		
NAZARETH (to the audience) I watched my mother <u>pad</u> into the kitchen and heard the clinking of <u>crockery</u> as she put on a fresh pot and I quickly checked for Junior in the basement. He wasn't there and I thought for a moment maybe he had somehow found the courage to wind up back upstairs after all. Then, listening to my father's playing, I thought about Aziza <u>rustling</u> around in my old room upstairs, doing God Knows What - avoiding me? I had been waiting for enough courage to show up to go upstairs and talk to her but I couldn't do it. Then, as if she'd been reading my mind, she was coming down the stairs, trying to sneak out.		
Word	Synonyms	Effect
pad		
crockery		
rustling		

The Civil Rights Movement

History, Faith, Activism, and Legacy

What Was the Civil Rights Movement?

The modern Civil Rights Movement was a mass movement for racial equality that challenged segregation, racial discrimination, and the denial of constitutional rights to Black Americans. The movement drew on decades of organizing and legal challenges, but the period from the mid-1950s through the 1960s brought sustained national attention to demands for equal protection, desegregation, voting rights, fair employment, and access to public life. Protesters used lawsuits, boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides, mass marches, voter-registration campaigns, and nonviolent civil disobedience to confront discriminatory laws and practices (National Park Service, “The Modern Civil Rights Movement”).

The 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. The following year, the Montgomery Bus Boycott mobilized Black residents against segregated public transportation and helped bring the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to national prominence. In the early 1960s, campaigns in cities including Birmingham, along with the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, intensified pressure for federal action. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination in public accommodations and employment, while the Voting Rights Act of 1965 strengthened federal protections against racial discrimination in voting (National Park Service).

Faith and the Movement

Black churches were more than places of worship during the movement: many served as meeting spaces, organizing centers, and sources of moral and financial support. Ministers including Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth, and C. K. Steele became nationally visible leaders. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), founded in 1957, brought ministers and community leaders together to coordinate nonviolent campaigns across the South. The organization played important roles in the March on Washington and the Selma voting-rights campaign (National Park Service, “Southern Christian Leadership Conference”).

King's leadership also reflected the influence of the Black church. The National Park Service notes that Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta provided King with both a pulpit and a position from which to organize civil-rights activity. Christian ideas of nonviolence, love, sacrifice, and redemption became part of the language through which many movement leaders described their struggle (National Park Service, “Martin Luther King, Jr.: From Youth to Leadership in Atlanta”).

Connection to *Purpose*

In *Purpose*, this history is personal rather than distant. Nazareth introduces his father as “the Honorable Reverend Solomon Jasper” and tells the audience that understanding his importance depends, in part, on how much one knows about the American Civil Rights Movement. Solomon is a pastor from generations of pastors and is remembered by Nazareth as an exceptional but undersung orator. By making the Jasper patriarch both a minister and a veteran civil-rights figure, the play places the family's private conflicts inside a larger history of Black religious leadership, public service, sacrifice, and expectation.

The Civil Rights Movement

History, Faith, Activism, and Legacy, continued

The Movement Comes North: Chicago

The struggle for civil rights was not confined to the South. In Chicago, activists challenged school segregation, discriminatory housing, poverty, and unequal access to opportunity. In 1966, Martin Luther King Jr. and his family moved into an apartment in North Lawndale on Chicago's West Side as King joined local activists in the Chicago Freedom Movement. The campaign focused particular attention on discriminatory housing practices and the conditions facing Black residents in the city (Chicago History Museum).

This Chicago history is especially useful when approaching *Purpose*. The play takes place in Illinois, and the Jasper family's prominence connects religion, politics, and Black public life. Chicago reminds us that the questions raised by the Civil Rights Movement (access, power, housing, political representation, and equality) were national questions, not only Southern ones.

A Brief Timeline

1954 — Brown v. Board of Education: the U.S. Supreme Court rules racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional.

1955–56 — Montgomery Bus Boycott: Black residents sustain a mass boycott of segregated buses; Martin Luther King Jr. emerges as a national leader.

1957 — The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is founded to coordinate civil-rights campaigns across the South.

1963 — Birmingham Campaign and March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom bring national attention to demands for racial and economic justice.

1964 — Civil Rights Act of 1964 becomes law, strengthening federal protections against discrimination.

1965 — Selma voting-rights campaign and marches help build momentum for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

1966 — King and local organizers pursue the Chicago Freedom Movement, focusing especially on housing discrimination and inequality.

1968 — King is assassinated in Memphis while supporting striking sanitation workers; civil-rights activism continues beyond his death.

Active Viewing (Look-For)

Solomon's generation fought to expand freedom and opportunity. What happens when the achievements of one generation become expectations for the next? As you watch *Purpose*, look for moments in which the Jasper children respond to a legacy they did not create but are expected to carry.

Journal Prompt: Describe an elder (from family, school, or community) with high expectations for you.

- How did their expectations impact your choices and actions?
- Did you appreciate their guidance or fight against it?

Historical Figures

The Jasper family in Purpose is connected to many prominent figures in the American Civil Rights movement. Below are historical figures mentioned in Purpose in order of reference.

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.		A Baptist pastor and trailblazing politician who represented Harlem in the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming a powerful national spokesman for civil rights and social justice.
Frederick Douglass		A formerly enslaved man who became a brilliant orator, writer, and prominent abolitionist leader, advocating for the end of slavery. He wrote three autobiographies, including <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i> .
George Washington Carver		An agricultural scientist and inventor who developed hundreds of products using peanuts, sweet potatoes, and soybeans to help poor Southern farmers improve their soil and economic standing.
Gwendolyn Brooks		A highly regarded poet and author, Gwendolyn Brooks became the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1950 for her poetry collection <i>Annie Allen</i> . Her most famous poem is " We Real Cool ", published in her 1960 collection <i>The Bean Eaters</i> .
Harriet Tubman		An abolitionist and political activist. After escaping slavery herself, Tubman made some 13 missions to rescue approximately 70 enslaved people using the Underground Railroad network.
James Baldwin		A powerful novelist, essayist, and playwright whose works—such as <i>The Fire Next Time</i> and <i>Giovanni's Room</i> —offered profound and incisive critiques of race, sexuality, and class in mid-20th-century America.
Jesse Jackson		A civil rights activist, Baptist minister, and politician who worked alongside Martin Luther King Jr. and later mounted two significant national campaigns for the Democratic presidential nomination in the 1980s.
Jesse Owens		A track and field athlete who achieved international fame by winning four gold medals at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, single-handedly crushing Adolf Hitler's myth of Aryan supremacy.
John Lewis		A towering civil rights leader and politician who served as a U.S. Representative for decades and was a key organizer of the 1965 Selma to Montgomery marches.

Historical Figures

Continued

Langston Hughes		A pioneering poet, novelist, and playwright who was a central figure of the Harlem Renaissance, best known for his insightful, colorful portrayals of Black life in America.
Madam C.J. Walker		An entrepreneur, philanthropist, and political activist who is recorded as the first female self-made millionaire in America through her highly successful line of cosmetics and hair care products for Black women.
Mae Jemison		An engineer, physician, and former NASA astronaut who made history in 1992 as the first Black woman to travel into space aboard the Space Shuttle <i>Endeavour</i> .
Martin Luther King Jr.		A prominent civil rights leader and Baptist minister who championed nonviolent resistance against racial segregation and is world-renowned for his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech
Nelson Mandela		A South African anti-apartheid revolutionary, political leader, and philanthropist who spent 27 years in prison before leading his country's transition to a multiracial democracy and serving as its first Black president.
Rosa Parks		A civil rights activist whose refusal to surrender her bus seat to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama, ignited the Montgomery bus boycott and broader civil rights movement.
Thurgood Marshall		A prominent civil rights lawyer who successfully argued the landmark <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> case and later became the first African American Supreme Court Justice.
W.E.B. Du Bois		An influential sociologist, historian, and civil rights activist who co-founded the NAACP and advocated for the higher education and intellectual advancement of Black Americans.
Zora Neale Hurston		A celebrated author, anthropologist, and filmmaker of the Harlem Renaissance, most widely recognized for her classic 1937 novel, <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> .

Historical Figures – Activity

Choose one of the figures in Purpose referenced above. Research more about their life.

Historical Figure Name

Early Life, Influences, Family (What shaped them?)	Lesser-Known Accomplishments (what achievements are often overshadowed by their famous work?)
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Major Accomplishments, Beliefs, Values

Later Life and Lasting Legacy	References
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Prison Reform

Prison reform refers to the ongoing efforts to improve conditions within correctional systems (jails and prisons). This includes improving the physical conditions inside facilities, changing how sentences are decided and handed down, and shifting the primary goal of the justice system from punishment to rehabilitation.

While the legal system aims to maintain public safety, the United States currently incarcerates a higher proportion of its population than almost any other nation. According to the Equal Justice Initiative, the United States accounts for roughly 20% of the world's total incarcerated population, despite holding less than 5% of the overall global population. Understanding how the system works—and where it falls short—is essential to evaluating how the system and society treat people when a crime has occurred.

Key Issues Driving the Reform Movement

1. Mass Incarceration and Overcrowding

Over the last 50 years, policy shifts led to a sharp increase in the U.S. prison population. Strict sentencing guidelines, such as "three-strikes" laws mean that prison sentences almost double for a person with a second felony or violent offense and increase to a life sentence if there's a third felony. This coupled with policies like mandatory minimums for nonviolent drug offenses, filled state and federal facilities beyond capacity. Overcrowding makes prisons harder to manage, increasing danger for inmates and workers, and drastically limits access to healthcare, mental health services, and educational programs.

2. Punishment vs. Rehabilitation

The United States prison system is founded on a deterrence model, operating on the belief that long, harsh prison stays discourage future crime. Research suggests, however, that long sentences do little to prevent reoffending. Advocates for reform emphasize shifting toward a rehabilitative model—working for reform or making positive changes in incarcerated peoples' lives. It seeks to help the underlying reasons for many crimes such as poverty, lack of education, mental illness, or addiction by providing incarcerated individuals with vocational training, counseling, high school equivalency diplomas, and college coursework so they can successfully transition back into society.

3. Racial and Economic Disparities

Statistics also consistently show that Black, Hispanic, and low-income individuals are disproportionately arrested, convicted, and given longer prison sentences compared to white individuals charged with similar offenses. People of color make up approximately 42-44% of the population of the U.S., but account for 70% of incarcerated people in correctional systems. Another practice that creates racial and economic inequities is cash bail. This requires arrested individuals to pay before they can be released from jail. Reforming cash bail systems—which often keep low-income individuals in jail before trial simply because they cannot afford bail—is a major focus for advocates addressing these economic and racial inequities.

Prison Reform

Continued

4. Recidivism and Reentry

Recidivism refers to a person's relapse into criminal behavior after serving a sentence. In the U.S., more than two-thirds of released individuals are rearrested within three years. Returning to society with a criminal record often creates massive hurdles to finding housing, securing a job, or getting financial aid for education. Without support systems in place after release, many people end up back in the justice system.

What Progress Is Being Made?

- **Legislative Action:** Bipartisan policy changes, such as the [*First Step Act of 2018*](#), have reduced mandatory minimum sentences for certain nonviolent drug offenses and expanded programs aimed at lowering recidivism.
- **Diversion Programs:** Many states are expanding drug courts and mental health courts. These are alternatives to the regular criminal courts that direct nonviolent offenders into treatment and community service instead of prison.
- **Expanding Educational Opportunities:** Reinstating federal Pell Grants for incarcerated students has allowed more individuals to earn degrees while serving their time, significantly lowering reoffending rates upon release.

All in all, prison reform isn't just about changing what happens inside a cell—it's about rethinking how we define accountability, safety, and second chances, and who's worthy of them.

Beekeeping

According to the University of Georgia Bee Program, beekeeping is livestock management with a goal of a healthy, flourishing hive and honey to harvest. Backyard beekeeping is a common practice that should be taken seriously and not treated as "decorative gardening."

Advice for 1st Year Beekeepers:

- Hives should not produce honey in their first year.
- Instead, the beekeeper's focus should be on health, mite management, and surviving winter
- Start with 1-2 boxes
- Utilize mentors or begin beekeeping with a partner

Tools to Get Started:

- **Hive** - Box where bees live
- **Smoker** - Smoke lessens aggressive behavior from bees
- **Hive Tool** - Small hand tool used to pry open beehive frames
- **Protective Gear** - Worn head to toe including a veil to protect from bee stings



Photo by: iStock

Beekeeping Activity

Close Reading of Symbolism

Directions: Read the passages below closely and use the graphic organizer to interpret the playwright's use of beekeeping as a symbol in this play.

Passage 1: Act 1, Scene 2 (page 30)

SOLOMON

Bees are different! That is me connecting to my roots. That's my legacy.

NAZARETH

Roots? What roots?

SOLOMON

Your great grandfather used to keep bees - my granddaddy - hives and hives of them tucked up in the woods on the outskirts of his farm. And what a genius he had. Those bees seemed to trust him instinctively - to love him, even. He would walk right up to his hives and it was like they would just hand him the honey; it was almost supernatural. Our ancestors were in such a deeper communion with God's majesty in a way I fear I've lost - we've lost. And maybe it's old age but all that stuff is suddenly feeling very... appealing to me - all the things folks used to do down home in the country - fishing, beekeeping, hunting. I keep having this urge to go hunting.

Passage 2: Act 2, Scene 3 (page 104)

SOLOMON

This is going to sound ridiculous and I don't intend it to but... I really loved those bees... They're such extraordinary creatures... In a hive, you know, they are all related and they are literally born with a role to play. They emerge from their cells with no confusion as to their purpose. And there's not a hive you will find anywhere on the planet that doesn't adhere to some version of these rules. It's one of those things I find that, if you think about it long enough, you can't help but wonder at God's power - his supreme intelligence and majesty... And honey never ever spoils. Did you know that? Everything else anybody or anything can make in the world spoils... but not honey. And bees just... make that. And to think that I could, in some small way, participate in the miracle of honey, a sweetness everlasting... It gave me... purpose. Yes. A small sense of purpose.

Beekeeping symbolizes:	
Textual evidence:	Passage 1: Passage 2:
What symbol would you use to reflect the same topic in your own life?	

LGBTQIA+ and Queer Identity

The LGBTQIA+ community is vast and diverse. These are just some of the terms used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

	Androgynous Pride Flag Read More	People who identify as a combination of male and female
	Asexual Pride Flag Read More	People who experience no (or little) sexual attraction to others
	Bisexual Pride Flag Read More	People who are attracted to two or more genders
	Demisexual Pride Flag Read More	People who feel sexually attracted to someone only when they are in love
	Gay Pride Flag (inclusive) Read More	Traditional symbol for the entire LGBTQ+ community
	Genderqueer Pride Flag Read More	Umbrella term for people who identify with non-binary genders
	Graysexual Pride Flag Read More	People who fall somewhere between asexual and sexual, but do not want to be defined as specifically asexual
	Lesbian Pride Flag Read More	Pride flag representing the whole lesbian community
	Non-Binary Pride Flag Read More	People who do not identify with the male-female gender binary
	Trans Pride Flag or Transgender Pride Flag Read More	People who do not identify with the gender they were assigned to when they were born

Discussion Questions

Pre-Show Questions

1. What do you predict “purpose” might refer to as the title of this play?
 - How would you define the word “purpose” (in your own words)?
 - Share an example of an object with a clear purpose.
 - Share an example of a person with a clear purpose.
2. Who is one of your personal heroes?
 - What do you admire most about this person?
 - What would you ask them if you had the opportunity to meet with them?
3. What ideas come to mind when you think about “family legacy”?
 - Should somebody’s greater purpose connect to their family’s history or goals?

Post-Show Questions

1. How did the technical aspects of this production illustrate the importance of “legacy” to this story?
 - Specifically, consider the approaches taken with costume, set, lighting, and sound design.
2. Which design elements and/or moments most clearly illustrated Aziza’s status as an outsider in the Jasper household?
3. Is it important to maintain a “good reputation”?
 - Which character is most concerned with “reputation” in this play, and how is that revealed?
 - Which character is least concerned with “reputation” in this play, and how is that revealed?
 - How does the topic of “reputation” relate to your own community, school, or social circles?
4. Is Claudine a hero, a villain, or something in between?
 - Recount Claudine’s narrative arc – where does she begin, go, and end throughout this play?
 - Which moments illustrate her fierce (and justified) commitment to protecting her family?
 - Which moments illustrate her fierce (and unjustified) commitment to protecting her family?



Pictured: First rehearsal at Alliance Theatre

Photo by: Kathleen Covington

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