

Africa in America, Gullah!
By: Mary E. Weems, Ph.D.

Characters:

Ms. Anderson: Classroom Teacher

Key Students: Misha, Michael, Jacquette, Akil

Other Students: Various Names

(#16, THEY WILL BECOME OTHER CHARACTERS in the PLAY)

SCENE I: THE LESSON BEGINS:

Setting:

*Classroom is decorated with images of African Americans, the continent of Africa is prominent, there are artifacts including a mud cloth draped across the teacher's desk, an African American statue, etc. Miles Davis' "My Funny Valentine plays in the background- students enter "noisily talking" wearing t-shirts (to be used during Q & A with **Gullah words on the front and the english translation on the back note: use words in play** of their t-shirts which are "different" colors*

Jacquetta: I see, Ms. Anderson's still playing Miles Davis this week.

Akil: Yeah, and she's playing the same song too—

Michael: She sure is—*My Funny Valentine*

Misha: Wonder why, oh I know, Ms. Anderson's in loooooove!

All laugh. Ms. Anderson enters carrying books

Anderson: In love with what?

All: Hi Ms. Anderson, what's up?

Anderson: (*Smiling*) You all are "up" up for trouble if you don't hurry up and get out of my business the same way you got into it!

Akil: You mean the back way?

Misha: Ooooooooooh! Akil's getting smart with Ms. Anderson...

Akil: No, I'm not, Misha you always trying to start something.

Anderson: That's okay, Akil no harm done, I know what you meant, and Misha *you* be quiet before I tell who I saw *you* walking to school with this morning.

Misha: Aw, Ms. Anderson please—

Anderson: (*Laughing*) Cool out young lady I was just kidding, I didn't even see you this morning. Anyway, let's get started. Somebody tell me something about the Gullah culture from the reading for last night.

Michael: Ms. Anderson, you forgot something.

Anderson: What is that Michael?

Jacquette: You know the music history game.

Anderson: Oh, that's right I'm so excited about today's Gullah lesson, I forgot about it, plus I got a late start this morning and that always throws me off.

Misha: I know that's right, I remember—

Anderson: Say what?

Misha: (*Quietly*) Oops! Sorry, Miss Anderson, I'll be quiet.

Anderson: Okay, so who can tell me something about Miles Davis.

All raise their hands

Anderson: Jacquette

Jacquette: Miles Davis didn't care about education.

Anderson: What?! Why do you say that?

Jacquette: Because he gave up a full scholarship to Julliard!

Akil: Maybe so, but that's only part of the story and not even the punchline.

Anderson: (*Smiling*) Teach us, Akil.

Akil: It wasn't that Mr. Davis didn't value education. I mean come on now ya'll think about it. Education is the first thing our ancestors struggled

for coming out of slavery time. They knew that education is freedom, and the way to a better quality of life. So, no that had nothing to do with it.

Jacquetta: Okay, we all know that, we don't need a lecture. What *does* it have to do with?

Akil: Miles Davis was a genius! He was already creating music in his head we won't even begin to understand until Juvember—he

Michael: (*Laughing*) Unh, unh wait a minute now “Juvember?” What kind of word is that?

Akil: (*Laughing*) One of my grandmother's words brother, now let me finish.

Anderson: Yes, do so we can get to our goals for today.

Akil: Okay, anyway—Miles Davis didn't think Juilliard could teach him anything about the one kind of music he was most interested in playing—jazz. This is because jazz is an African American art form that started in Congo Square, in New Orleans, and most of the musicians who were playing it when Mr. Davis was coming up were into improvising—the heart of jazz. So, no, he thought education was very important—it's just that the kind he was interested in was going on in jazz clubs, and cigarette smoked filled, late night joints where musicians hang out.

Anderson: Yes! I'm impressed young man. Okay, class what do you think? Between Jacquetta and Akil—whose got game today?

All: Akil!

Jacquetta: No doubt, I agree.

Anderson: Alright, Akil—not that you need them, but you score the 5 extra Black history points today. Congratulations young man!

All: SANKOFA! AKIL!

Michael and Akil give each other hi fives

Anderson: Okay, who's next on the list to lead our community circle?

Misha: I am Ms. Anderson! Okay everybody let's get in our circle.

Students quickly join hands

Anderson: Okay, class nice and loud now, let's get some positive ancestor vibes in this space.

Misha: (*All repeat after her*) "We come together" "to learn about our ancestors" "and love ourselves," "we will respect each other," "help each other" "and always do our best!" THREE POWER CLAPS ON THREE 1, 2, 3 (*CLAP, CLAP, CLAP!*).

Anderson: Thank you Misha. Now, who can tell me something they learned from the reading yesterday?

Student: Well, I know the first thing I learned in the reading that surprised me was how Black people really stuck together back then.

Anderson: What do you mean by that?

Student #1: I mean, it wasn't about just "one" person and what they wanted and needed as individuals, it was about the entire community and what they needed to do to help each other.

Student #2: Yeah, I feel you S1. I noticed the same thing. Not like now, when everybody seem to be on their own stuff. It's like everybody in my neighborhood is looking out for themselves and their individual family, not the whole community.

All: Break into separate unintelligible conversations, "but" agreeing with what's just been said.

Anderson: All right, all right! Let's come back together. Hmmm, seems as though you all have already learned one of the main points of this lesson—community. It will be interesting to see what else you learn by

the time we're finished with our Gullah unit. Now, each of you is going to select a small part of the region to research, but it will be up to your four group leaders Misha, Michael, Jacquetta, and Akil to work with your small groups to decide who is going to research what based upon one of these topics: Okay—

Michael: Ooo Ms. Anderson, I already know—

Anderson: (*Smiling*) Young man, I know you're excited because you stayed after class yesterday to help me select these topics—but be quiet and let me finish!

Michael: Okay, sorry ma'am.

Anderson: That's okay, anyway, there are four main areas I'd like our class to focus on. The first is the arrival of the West Africans from the Rice Coast, which consisted of Senegal, Liberia, and Sierra Leone to Sullivan's Island, including the story of why these African experts in rice cultivation were sought, and what plantation life was like.

Akil: Our group will take that one!

Anderson: (*Taking note in her binder*) Okay, Akil. Remember, even though you are the lead researcher for this segment, you and your group should discuss the various parts of this lesson, and come to an agreement about who will take which part.

Akil: Yes, Ms. Anderson, we will.

Anderson: Yes, my butt (*Laughing*) That's what you always say, then I always have to step in and stop you from trying to run everything. (*Sounds of agreement from his group*) Moving right along. The next section has to do with religion and how our African ancestors managed to hold on to some of their African beliefs while adopting the Christian religion of their white masters.

Many plantations had a Praise House where Africans and African Americans would hold their own services. There they could escape the prying eyes of the master and express themselves in prayer and song

based on African culture and tradition. One of the practices was something they called “seeking.” Who would like to take this part?

Misha: We will! Ms. Anderson! We will!

Anderson: You will? Misha, I’m surprised—your family’s Muslim, aren’t you?

Misha: Yep, but I’ve been raised to respect all religions, and I’m always interested in learning about other ones.

Anderson: Good, well have fun. The third part of this project has to do with how African American women after slavery time were the “first” to venture in to the city of Charleston, South Carolina to do business with their white neighbors.

Jacquetta: Are you talking about the Flower Ladies Ms. Anderson?

Anderson: Yes, young lady—and that wasn’t in the reading for yesterday. How do you know?

Jacquetta: Because my family’s from South Carolina, and my grandmother used to tell me stories about them, that were passed down from her grandmother who “was” a Flower Lady.

Anderson: Oh my God! That’s wonderful Jacquetta. Would you like to take the lead on this one??

Jacquetta: I sure would, definitely.

Anderson: Then that leaves us with one more main section, and for me it’s the most important one. Education and how and when the Penn School, the first school in the region was started.

Michael: Ms. Anderson, now you “know” I want that one—after all, one day I’m going to be a teacher—and

Anderson: Okay, okay, Michael (*Laughing*) we don’t have time for a rundown of your game plan for your entire life this morning. I think everybody in here could recite it back to you, you repeat it so often.

Michael: *(Laughing)* I know Ms. Anderson, but I can't help it—I've wanted to be a teacher all my life and you "know" you inspire me.

All: *(Kissing sounds)*

Anderson: All right class cut it out. Michael doesn't have to go for brownie points in our class—her hard work gets all of those A's she "never" brags about. So, you all just hush up now! Michael you've got it. Now class, it's Friday, and we have about 40 minutes left of our 80- minute block. We need to give the four group leaders time to begin their research so they can get some ideas on what the sub-topics are so they can share them with you on Monday. I'm going to allow the rest of you to go with me to the library to see a short film about Gullah culture, while they stay here and begin their work. By the time we come back together on Monday—they'll be ready to report what they've learned and we'll move on from there.

(Everyone else exits and the group 4 leaders begin their research. One at a time— each is spotlighted as they use keyboard to enter the computer screen, which is their portal into the past).

SCENE II: THE POINT OF NO RETURN

Characters:

Sankofa: Griot
Student: Akil
Agriculturalist John
Field Slave #1, Woman
Field Slave #2, Man
Field Slave #3, Woman
Seeking Mother: Mother Randolph
Dancers African Dance

*As soon as Akil begins to do his research an **image** (African drums are heard in the background) of a map of Africa highlighting Sierra Leone, etc. Appears on the big screen establishing **place** as W. Africa. Dancers enter doing an African dance that last several minutes.*

As the dance continues a loud scream is heard indicating “intruders coming to snatch them from their homeland” dancers stop white intruders come to kidnap them, and there is a transition from Sierra Leone to the slave ship waiting to take them to the Gullah region (sound cues)

*Next **image** takes us to the plaque on Sullivan's Island. Akil moves toward the screen and as he watches, he hears the beat of a distant African drum. Next, the Griot appears moving slowly to the drum sounds. Akil hears his voice:*

Sankofa: Come back!

Akil: *(Startled he starts to run then turns back)* What!

Sankofa: Are you deaf! Come back! Young man, you must come—

Akil: *(Starting to look around)* Huh? Young man?
You don't know me! Are you the shadow I just saw a few minutes ago?
Is this some kind of trick, is this the Twilight Zone?

Sankofa: Show some respect young man! I am your ancestor, do NOT try my patience now—

- Akil: (*With respect and relief*) I'm sorry. You scared me, that's all. I knew something special was about to happen—felt it in my spirit, as soon as Ms. Anderson gave us this assignment. Will you tell me your name?
- Sankofa: Me name is Sankofa, young man, Sankofa. Do you know what it means?
- Akil: (*Excited*) Yes, I do elder. It means one must return to the past in order to move forward. It's one of the first things Ms. Anderson taught us about our African heritage.
- Sankofa: This is good. All children need to know where they come from. You can't make a good life without your history. It's like trying to operate a computer without software—it can't work. I'm here to help you on your journey.
- Akil: I'm so glad to hear that because Ms. Anderson just gave us this—
- Sankofa: I know, I know. No need to explain. I am the spirit of your African past.
- Akil: Thanks, elder Sankofa. What can you teach me about the beginning of the Gullah region?
- Sankofa: Enough to make you work hard to know more about a proud African people who held on to their west African culture including their language for centuries and even in the time you live in.
- Akil: Speaking of “time” that's what weird about this. How can I be here in 2007, the 21st century listening to you, when—
- Sankofa: Young man, we don't have *time* for me to explain the workings of the Creator, the all seeing, all knowing one some call God, Allah, Yahweh, Jehovah. Trust that this is all happening like all things for its own reason—some times we understand the why of things, some times we don't.
- Akil: (*Pausing to think about this he hears a scream. As behind the scrim dancers in chains begin exiting the boat that appears as an image on the computer screen*) Sankofa!?

Sankofa: (*Louder voice*) No one ever talked about the smell.

On the screen an image of a slave ship appears. At the same time dancers begin to lay down head to foot, head to foot, like the slaves in the bottom of a ship their bodies move, to suggest discomfort, and pain and the screams magnify. Screams subside, but the movement, writhing, fists drumming the bottom of the boat to communicate. etc. continues in the background as dialogue moves forward:

Akil: Oh Lord! Where are we? What time is it? What do you mean smell?

Sankofa: History's going on young man. The beginning of our people's time as slaves in the Gullah region. It is the 1700s –

Akil: 1700s! We've just started reading about it in our class—Ms. An—

Sankofa: (*As if he can't hear him*) the 1700s and the first ship has just arrived with the skilled Africans from the Rice Coast countries—Senegal, Liberia—

Akil: Liberia, that's the African country started by African Americans who went back to Africa!

Sankofa: And a number of other West African countries, but most of all Sierra Leone. West African men, women, and children chained together in the bowel of a ship designed to carry animals, and supplies. No one ever talks about the smell--the odor of themselves after weeks and weeks chained head to foot like sardines. A proud people treated like animals, enslaved and brought here by white men to make rice grow.

Behind the scrim dancers are beginning to rise, carefully test their wobbly legs. They begin walking around slowly behind the scrim, to embrace each other, to help each other prepare to exit.

Akil: Couldn't the slave masters figure out how to do it for themselves?

Sankofa: They tried to when rice seeds started being imported on supply ships in the late 1600s, but they weren't any good at it. They had no experience growing rice and other tropical crops. The white landowners, and indentured servants also had a hard time dealing with the hot, wet

climate conditions required for rice and the tropical diseases such as malaria.

Akil: Then why didn't they just forget about it and grow other things?

Sankofa: Because they'd heard about the agricultural ability of the West Africans from white explorers, and traders, and since the Sea Islands that make up the Gullah Region had a similar climate—they knew these intelligent agriculturalists could make rice and other things grow here too.

Akil: Wow! I never knew that! And my great, great grandparents are from here—funny my family only passed down the good things about our culture and Sullivan's Island. And until Ms. Anderson's class all we learned in school was a little about slavery, and a lot about the Civil War.

Sankofa: That's because America's ashamed of its slave past, and proud of its Civil War history. Akil, school is important, but you don't learn everything in school—life has its own lessons, and what you don't learn in school can be found in the world, in books, and in the stories passed down by ancestors who've passed it down, so your generation can listen and pass it down to your children.

The dancers begin walking out onto the stage, one male, one female step up to the auction blocks. As Sankofa continues:

Sankofa: Once here, this place known as the Black Ellis Island, what I call the Point of No Return, became a place bustling with business.

Akil: You mean the business of selling our ancestors.

Sankofa: Yes. First, they were herded from the ship like sheep. Then taken to shacks called pest houses, where they were de-loused and checked for diseases like malaria and small pox, deadly to the white men who sent for them.

Dancers slowly get up and circle behind the scrim a few times. They circle Akil and make him part of their group then begin entering the pest house image on screen. Two slaves (one male, one female dancer) exit shortly afterwards guided by Akil who is now an auctioneer and take their places on opposing auction blocks. Men gather to inspect

the Africans, listen to the auctioneer and shout their bids as appropriate music plays as a backdrop.

Akil

(Auctioneer): Come, come, gather round. A fresh cargo, of 94 prime, healthy Negroes! 39 men, fifteen boys, 24 women and 16 girls. Just arrived from Sierra-Leon! Expert rice growers, come one, come all!

Man #1: (*Moves to the female slave. Pulls back her head and opens her mouth to inspect her teeth. Next he puts his hands on her hips*)
This one feels strong enough to work the fields from sun up to sun down, and from the width of her hips, she'll bear many a black child in the bargain!

Auctioneer: Watch yourself now kind gentlemen. Give others a chance to inspect the merchandise. We don't have all day now you know!

Man #1 moves away while reaching into his pocket to take out a bag of gold coins to count in preparation for the bidding.

Man #2: (*Moves to the male slave. pulls back his head and opens his mouth to inspect his teeth. next, he uses his hands to check the strength of his upper body, asks him to turn around so he can see the strength of his back.*)
A healthy specimen indeed! I'm betting at least 12 of the 24 females in this shipment, belong to him. He'll make a fine worker for my plantation!

Auctioneer: Please step away from the slaves! It's time for the auction to begin.

Stage darkens. Only the sounds of the sale are heard. Akil as auctioneer hollers several prices then the sale for both the male and female who are heard being dragged off by their new owners.

Lights up. Akil is heard singing a slave work song as he re-enters the staging area, followed by several slaves who are like him all singing and hoeing in unison. As the song ends:

Akil: Let's stop for food! Let's stop for food! Hurry up now! The rice won't wait long.

All of them reach for their knapsacks and sit down to eat together, as John and Akil begin to talk

John: Man, what you know about rice! Just because you was picked by the white man to boss us, you already been living in this area a long time—don't mean you know much about rice.

Akil: (*Chuckling*) What you say is for true, but my roots start in Sierra Leon like you. My mother carry me in her belly to this new place—and I'm

John: I know, I know, ya proud of your African-ness. But me, I come already grown, from our own land, and my own father's rice fields back home. He taught me everything I need to know to make it grow over there, and right here in this land of misery too.

Akil: Will you tell the story one more time John? Will you tell it so our children can remember to tell it to their children when they come?

John: (*Laughing*) First ya need a wife, young man, first ya need a wife!

Akil: Quit your joking and tell it.

Image of rice field appears on the screen. Image should reflect the levels of the fields so that the audience is able to see what John's describing

John: All right now. A long, long time ago back home a land of lush, and green, and love—my father's, father's father figured out how to make de water do his biddin to grow rice for food. He sat by de edge of de water for days and days watchin' and watchin' and payin' attention to how de water worked movin' in and out, in and out with de tide. Den,

FS #1: Hey, mahn, let me help you with dis...now, after a time he noticed that de fresh water flowin' out from de land was lighter in weight than de salt water comin' in from de ocean.

FS #2: De fresh sat on top of de salt water for a time. Den, with de help of de other men in de village, dey figured out that dey needed to dig canals enough and build levies around the fields high enough to irrigate de land wit tidal water.

John: When de ocean water came in, de inland “tide” water ran over top of it—den, like I show you how to do it here, dey opened a sluice gate just enough to let in de tidal water and keep out de ocean salt water which would kill de rice plants.

Akil: Sounds like it took more than one try before their plan was workin’ just right.

FS #3: True, but dey kept tryin’ because dey knew if dey didn’t figure it out, dey wouldn’t have rice to eat.

Akil: Yes, woman tell it! Fresh-water dat was de key to everythin’.

John: Quit your talkin’ and eat mahn, let me finish!

Akil: *(Laughing)* Goes back to his food.

John: Anyway now, I start with dis part because it’s de most important. You can’t grow crops without water, and crops won’t grow with salt water.

FS #1: True, so our ancestors had to figure out how to get fresh water to keep de soil wet, and de rice irrigated through the growin’ season. Once dey figured dat part out—

Akil: Den it was just a matter of dealin’ wit de back breakin’ work of –

John: Mud and misery! Just like it is now here in the Sea Islands. First, in de late spring we use de oxen or our own backs to pull de plow across the wetland to make the “drills” or rows for the seeds.

FS #2: Next, we plant de seeds and flood de fields so de seeds will sprout. Just three weeks later, we weed de young plants and cover dem wit water.

FS #3: Around mid June or July we flood de plants and leave dem under de water for two months. During this time, until de harvest in late September, early October, we spend most of our time in de fields knee deep in mud, the stench of the standing water we have to keep covered with fresh, the mosquitoes dat love de climate and—

FS #1: And don't forget about de summer heat, and de cold, cold, South Carolina nights.

Akil: I don't know what's de most misery—the growin' of rice or de harvestin' of it.

John: Dat's because you de one busy givin' de orders mahn—it's de growin'—definitely! Not dat de harvestin' is easy. Once de stalks of rice come full grown, den it's de cuttin' down with sickles, spreadin' it on the ground to dry, and beatin' de rice wit—

FS #2: A short, heavy stick to separate de rice from de stalks.

FS #3: To get to de white grains people buy and eat, de brown hull had to be removed. They'd use a mortar and pestle to grind away de hull and then fanner baskets made of sweetgrass to toss de rice into de air so de broken hulls would be blow away. Dis was done several times. Last, de rice was loaded into 600-pound barrels. Why you got that far away look in your eye Akil?

Akil: (*Quietly*) Because I'm rememberin' how glad I am dat we manage to get along so well now—It's been a long time since Mr. Billy's been down this way.

John: Why you want to bring up fat miserable excuse for a person?

Akil: I don't, but I can't help it—My heart keeps goin' back to when dis place first started, and none of de slaves wanted to work for him. I was too young to go, but de men and some of dere women too, kept runnin' away in de night, in de dawn, even in de midday—

FS #1: Even though he catch dem and beat dem 100 lashes and more, dey don't stop!

John: Until the one day, he lined us all up and chained us together—hand to hand, foot-to-foot, neck to neck, leavin' enough room in de chains to work. He chained de spades to our hands and made us dig and dig, and dig ditches to drain de rice swamps, over and over until some of us drop, some of us die—until we give in to de shackle and choose work over death.

All of their heads bow in silence for a moment remembering the dead

Akil: After two long years, this way. Two long years. And de only way we make it through, is de only way our ancestors made it—by workin' hard together, respectin' each other and lookin' out for de good of de community.

FS #2: Dis is so true. De one big difference between here and back home other than freedom, is de white folks' way of cuttin' and dividin' everythin' up into its own little individual part.

John: And each person wantin' his own individual plot, each man lookin' out for himself and his family. Back home each of us worked to take care of not just ourselves but our entire village.

Akil: Here we work for no pay, and very little else, just enough boiled rice, cornmeal, butter, bacon fat, salt and molasses to survive.

FS #2: Course, we grow our own vegetables, catch our own fish when we can. But in spite of dis and what we can sneak and do for each other, too many of us die young from poor food and not enough of it.

FS #3: Not to mention de malaria, and yellow fever dat take too many of us each year.

John: So true. But at least dey leave us almost completely to ourselves out here. We work at our own pace, keep our own rhythm with de songs we sing to help de day go by. We slaves for a time now, yes, but we have mostly each other for company—

Akil: Only because de Appleby family dat owns dis land and de other white landowners can't stand de heat, de weather, or de diseases we bring from back home—

FS #1: And thanks be to de Creator for dat small mercy. It's helped us stay closer to each other, to keep some of our traditions, to keep lovin' and helpin' each other as much as possible.

Akil: Plus, we only have a few white folks to deal wit, for most of de year.
And—

FS #3: When master Appleby and his family do come, it's mostly to see de fruits of our labor, count dey money, and go back to de soft place they live—leavin' us to our own ways.

John: Dey knew what dey were doin when dey dragged us from our land—de best at makin de rice grow. And though I hate de bondage of slavery, we know it won't be forever, dat freedom's comin' and—

John's interrupted by the distant sound of singing. Seeking Mother Randolph's approaching

Sankofa: Young man! (*Akil and the others looks up*)

Akil: Yes, elder Sankofa?

Sankofa: This part of your lesson, is almost over. Get ready.

*Without explanation, Akil embraces John, then each of the other slaves as they return, get back into a line and get back to work in rhythm singing another slave work song as they exit together. As the song ends **an image of the plaque on Sullivan's Island appears and** Sankofa continues by reading part of it out loud **other appropriate images should connect with his words:***

Sankofa: Sullivan's Island's the place where hundreds of thousands of African first stepped on the shores of this country under the extreme conditions of human bondage and degradation. Almost half of all African Americans living today can trace their ancestors to Sullivan's Island. Only through God's blessings, a burning desire for justice and persistent

will to succeed against monumental odds, have African American created a place for themselves in the American mosaic. Africans and African Americans through the sweat of their brow have distinguished themselves in the Arts, Education, Medicine, Politics, Religion, Law, Athletics, Research, and Trades, Business, Industry, Economics, Science, Technology, and Community Social Services.

This memorial rekindles the memory of a dismal time in American history, but it also serves as a reminder of a people who despite injustice have retained the unique values, strengths, and potential that flow from our West African culture which came to this nation through the middle passage.

Fade to black as Sankofa ends and the spotlight hits Misha, who is about to research praise houses, churches, and the African American practice of “seeking”

Scene III: Seek and You Will Find

Characters:

Misha, Student Researcher
Sankofa
Seeking Mother Randolph
Pastor Middleton
God – as Dancing Star
Dancers

Misha: I've been a Muslim since I was a little girl. Don't remember when, thanks to mama and daddy, I didn't have a personal relationship with Allah. But my parents also raised me to be open minded, to be accepting of all religions. I'm supposed to learn more about something called "seeking," a special process that's part of African spiritual beliefs. Seeking was something a person had to go through before they were allowed to join the church of their choice. Let's see what I can find out.

As she begins her research an image of a sea island plantation and St. Helena's Island 1860 appears. Seeking Mother Randolph approaches carrying an Old Testament Bible, singing as praise dancers act out the song:

Mother

Randolph: Mary weep, Martha mourn (*Repeat*)
Mary weep over Lazarus grave
Go little lamb (golden) gonna shine.

Watch that satyr see how dey run (*Repeat*)
Star run down to the setting of the sun
Go little lamb (golden) gonna shine

What-cha gonna do dat day?
(*Repeat*)
Judgment day is a rollin long
Go little lamb (golden) gonna shine.

Anybody out there lookin' for God? Anybody out there need a church home? Come let seeking mother Randolph help bring you home. Let seeking mother Randolph help bring you home.

- Misha: Seeking Mother Randolph?
- Randolph: Yes, chile, what you want wit me this mornin'?
- Misha: Excuse me but I'm not a child ma'am, I come into my eighteenth year last week.
- Randolph: You're a chile to me, young one, I come into my 70th year long before you were born and I stopped my countin' after that.
- Misha: Yes, ma'am, I didn't mean no disrespect.
- Randolph: None taken. Now, what can I do for you?
- Misha: I've been wandering in the wilderness of disbelief all my life. I was just brought here from the Wiley plantation up North. Been raised without a mama or daddy, just an old slave woman named Mama Stella all my life who turned her back on God. I'm here tryin' to find my way to God, lookin' for a church home, can you help me?
- Randolph: (*Laughing with joy*) Well are you now? What happened to make you want to change your life?
- Misha: The night mama Stella came and tol' me dat I'd be leavin' Wiley for good. Not that it was anything special about de place, it was hard livin' there—workin' in de house from get up to lay down, day after day except when the massa gave the slaves worship time. And even den, I'd be in de big house helpin' Mama Stella talk to de spirits in a language only she knew. I felt so bad, so afraid—and for de first time in my life, I thought about God. I started to wonder if he could see me, if he cared anything about what happens to me, since I'm not one of his children—
- Randolph: Not one of his children? No, no now you wrong about dat chile, you for certain wrong bout dat. De only difference is “you” didn't know he was possible until dat moment but he's always known bout you. He's just been waitin' for you to seek him out, to want to come out of de wilderness—

- Misha: Will you help me Mother Randolph? Will you?
- Randolph: Of course, I will. It will take some time. First, you will have to go on Tuesday to de Praise House wit me, be introduced to de community, and den on Sunday, meet de pastor of our church home and declare your desire to find God in front of de entire congregation.
- Misha: And den?
- Randolph: Well, den you'll need to spend some time in de woods alone, beginning at midnight each night.
- Misha: Midnight? Why Midnight Mother Randolph?
- Randolph: Because midnight begins de most-high spiritual time—it's a time of dreams, a time to get closer to God, to see God, to begin to know him. But don't be afraid. Some of us will be close by and at dawn, you'll come out each time and tell me what you dreamed and what you saw.
- Misha: Am I supposed to see God in de wilderness?
- Randolph: Yes, chile you are.
- Misha: How long will it take?
- Randolph: It hard to say. Some time it take 3 days, some time it take 3 months, some time longer. You can't know, and you can't rush it. Think about it—it took you 18 years to come to want to know God.
- Misha: Yes, Mother Randolph—I understand, I took my own time, and dis will take its own time too.
- Randolph: Good! Den you've just had your first lesson from me. Dat's what I'm here for—to teach you what you need to know, to tell you what your dreams mean, to “know” when you're ready to be accepted into our Praise House community, and a member of our Church home.
- Misha: Thank you Mother Randolph for being willing to help me. I'm ready.

Randolph: Okay, we betta get back to work. You know de massa doesn't allow us to move about freely.

Misha: Yes, ma'am.

Randolph: Meet me at de edge of de woods Tuesday night just before dusk and I'll take you to Ebeneezer Church to be introduced before de seekin' begins at midnight.

They exit from opposite ends of the stage, then Sankofa speaks:

Sankofa: Misha was introduced that evening to de Praise House community at Ebeneezer who welcomed her with open arms. They wished her a good seeking experience and put her officially in Mother Randolph's Hands. Each night for the next two weeks Misha was taken to the edge of the woods by Mother Randolph and a couple of congregation members. Her head was tied in a white cloth, and a prayer was said over her. When she walked out of the woods at dawn, Mother Randolph met her, took her to a quiet place where Misha could tell her her dreams and what she saw. On the first night of the third week—something happened.

Misha is laying flat on her back in the midst of the words repeating the Lord's Prayer over and over

Misha: He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside de still waters, he restoreth my soul...

Suddenly a warm blue light appears, and a celestial sound is heard. Misha opens her eyes and watches as slowly several dancers dressed in light blue move into the space, form a half circle around her and look up at a bright white star. Out of the star a man appears all dressed in white (there is a star shape on his head) and begins to dance joyfully, legs kicking up in the air; his body a star, he god appearing to Misha as a dancing star

All fall to their knees and bow while Misha stands in the center caught up in the rapture of the moment. After a few minutes the other dancers move slowly out of the space and Misha continues to watch as god slowly places his hand on her head and disappears just as dawn begins to break

Misha shouts in glory and begins running out of the woods to find Mother Randolph

Randolph: Yes, chile! Yes, what happened to you?

Misha: Mother Randolph! Mother Randolph! I saw Him! I saw Him Mother Randolph. He put his hand on my head and for a few moments I couldn't see anything but a bright, bright light—clear and pure, and so white and warm—

Randolph: It felt like love, to you didn't it chile? Felt like pure love?

Misha: Yes! that's exactly right—I didn't have words for it, but dat's exactly what it felt like—being bathed in dis powerful, unconditional love

Randolph: De love of God, girl de love of God—you did it! You saw somethin' white and dat's de one true sign you've come out of de wilderness and into de safety of his embrace.

Misha: (*Joyful*) Ohhhhhh yes, Mother, yes! I'm so happy, and excited. You know you never told me exactly what sign you were lookin' for—

Randolph: Dat's because, if I tell you—den you find it, before it finds you. You make it happen in your mind like a wish, God has to happen to you when he's ready in de way he wants to, and in de vision, he allows you and you alone to see!

Misha: I feel so good, and complete and strange at de same time—it's

Randolph: Don't talk too much now. You've come through de wilderness of not knowing God. You're exhausted and dere's much to do between now and this Sunday's Prayer meeting. You, young woman are about to become a member of the Ebenezer Baptist Shore Church!

They begin singing an old gospel song together as they walk off to prepare

On the screen an image of Ebeneezer appears as the congregation begins to arrive at the church. Greeting each other, taking their seats, etc. the pastor enters

Pastor: At our small Tuesday evenin' service last week, a group of deacons asked Misha the questions developed by our Mother Randolph to make sure she's familiar with de Old Testament. She passed with flying colors, answering each question correctly with none of de usual hints our deacon panel usually gives dose dat have a little trouble rememberin'.

Randolph: And yesterday Pastor Middleton and the congregation sang as she was immersed in the water to have her earthly sins washed away, and be born again in Jesus' name.

Pastor: Thank you Mother Randolph. We're now ready to invite sister Misha to join our spiritual family. Will you bring her forward to be formally introduced?

Randolph: Misha! Come forward chile, and be embraced in His Holy Name.

Misha enters dressed in white from head to foot, a look of peace and love on her face as she walks to the front of the congregation with Mother Randolph and stand between her and the pastor

Pastor: Family, a long time ago before any of us was even a dream in our mother's imagination, we lived in a place where darkness was celebrated each day in de color of our ancestors faces, the blessed darkness of Africa. Back then, de way to spirituality was to seek the presence of God in de wilderness. Much has changed since we've been lost in dis strange land, but we've managed to hold on to de old way while embracing a new life in Jesus Christ.

Randolph: Now, I bring before you a young woman, new to our community but not to slavery. A young woman who was raised up on a plantation far away up North, where she wasn't allowed to learn about God. Please raise your voices in welcome and gratitude! A new young soldier is in our midst and her name is Misha! Let de congregation say Amen!

All: Amen! Welcome sister Misha!

Pastor: Young lady, do you have anything to share with us?

Misha: I just want to say “thank you” Lord! Thanks to Mother Randolph for teaching me everything I needed to know to help me have a positive seeking experience, thanks to Pastor Middleton for being willing let me join this wonderful church, and thanks to all of you—I promise to be worthy.

Pastor: Now let’s make a joyful noise! It’s time to celebrate!

All: Song: I Don’t Mind (pg. 41 Daise book)

I don’t mind; I don’t mind
I don’t mind; I don’t mind.
Long as my soul got a seat in the Kingdom,
I don’t mind; I don’t mind.

Mine, little *sista*, how you walk on the cross—
Yo’ feet might slip, and yo soul get los’!
Long as my soul got a seat in the Kingdom,
I don’t mind, I don’t mind.

I don’t mind; I don’t mind.
I don’t mind; I don’t mind.
Long as my soul got a seat in the Kingdom,
I don’t mind; I don’t mind.

Talk ‘bout me much as you please—
Mo’ you talk, I’m gon’ ben’ my knees!
Long as my soul got a seat in the Kingdom,
I don’t mind; I don’t mind.

I don’t mind; I don’t mind.
I don’t mind; I don’t mind.
Long as my soul got a seat in the Kingdom,
I don’t mind; I don’t mind.

Members form a circle and begin singing, handclapping and doing the “ring shout” moving in a circle, moving their feet energetically from side to side but never crossing their feet because that would signify dancing

As the congregation dances off the staging area, Sankofa speaks

Sankofa: Even though organized worship was forbidden by the slave masters, there were Praise Houses or Community Centers located on each plantation in the Gullah region. This is where the community came together, and where problems in the community were handled. First the people would appear in front of the deacons, then if the problem couldn't be resolved there, it was shared with the entire congregation at the local church.

Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays at dusk were the days and times of worship, and each prayer session ended with the "Shout" The practice of seeking continued until the birth of the Pentecostal church at Christ Church in the 1930s. After that many churches gave up the ritual of seeking for the spiritual gifts the Pentecostal church offered. A few churches still practice seeking today.

Scene IV: Free at Last!

Characters:

Jacqueta	Flower Girl
Flower Lady	Ms. Lee
Other Flower Ladies	***
Mrs. Waring	Member, Garden Club of Charleston
Judge	Judge Waring
Fast Foot Brown	Police Officer
Sankofa	Griot
Townspeople	Several

Jacqueta: A couple things from our first reading assignment about the Gullah Region surprised me. First, thanks to a Civil War battle at Port Royale, South Carolina that ended at the beginning of January in 1862, most of the Confederate white folks fled, and abandoned their lands in the low country. This made it possible for a lot of the former slaves to buy their land, and begin to control their own destiny. Second, the Bible's been translated into the Gullah language. Our ancestors were amazing! Let's see what else I can find out about that time period in Gullah history.

As Jacqueta begins her research an image of main street, Charleston, South Carolina, 1944 appears on the screen and the stage becomes a bustling street scene with vendor carts, pairs and small groups of people in animated conversation. A fourway intersection called “the four corners of law” at the intersection of “meeting” and “broad” streets which separated the post office, St. Michael’s church, city hall and the courthouse from the part of the street vendors are allowed representing the center of commerce are separated by a visible white line represents the center of the action. Audience can hear a flower lady approaching carrying her wears in a sweatgrass basket, wheeling her cart in front of her there’s a sign on her cart that holds the flower lady motto: if it grows, sell it

Ms. Lee wears a red bandana, and a badge with her name on it identifying her as a flower lady. She sings the flower lady jingle

Ms. Lee: “My name is Yuh Go Annie. Got my garden on my head. Flowers Da

is looking mighty fine. Fresh from the vine.” (*Other flower ladies chime in as she approaches. Repeat until she’s in place with her cart. There are already a couple of carts in place.*)

Man: Oh my God, ya know somethin’ good’s comin’ when the Flower Ladies start their singin’

Woman: Ya, and trouble’s comin’ too—ya know de white folks in charge around here, been decided since WWII ended, dat dey don’t want dem around—no way, no how.

Man: (*Laughing*) For true dat, but that’s been since the beginnin’ of this 1944 year and all I see each mornin’ is dat dey come right here like always makin’ no never mind to what de white law say.

Woman: Ya, de white woman Mrs. Judge Waring, and her Garden Club Ladies help wit dat.

Woman #2: Ya, unlike de first Mrs. Waring who left her husband because he support us. She didn’t like us makin’ money for our families.

Woman #3: And de Flower Ladies only listenin’ to de sound of dere children’s bellies, and dere need for money to make it—so dey catch dat Sappho ferry in de low country every mornin’ befo de sun get up—and come right here to sell dere wares.

Woman #2: De new Mrs. Waring, she understand. She buy from different flower ladies each time so we all got some help.

Man: Who is dat girl walkin’ up to Ms. Lee? I don’t see her round here befo?

Woman: Will you keep dat big nose of yours on your face? I’m guessin’ she’s a Flower girl—let’s keep our eyes and ears open—we’ll know soon enough.

Jacqueta: (*Approaches Ms. Lee*) Excuse me ma’am, but I seem to have lost my way can you help me please?

- Ms. Lee: Help! Help you girl. How strange ya talkin' now. Who are you and where you comin' from?
- Jacqueta: Well, I'm from a long time—
- Ms. Lee: (*Impatient*) Okay, okay, I don't have "long time" right now to listen to no long story. We need help round here. One of my regular Flower girls didn't show up dis mornin' and I need someone to cover de houses on her streets. Can you do dat fa me? I'll give you her same pay. Ten cents on every two dollas ya earn.
- Jacqueta: I, I, I don't know, you see—
- Ms. Lee: Stop your stutterin' girl—you just a chile, and right now nothin' ya know is helpin' me—except can ya' walk, can ya' talk, can ya' carry a sweetgrass basket on yo head?
- Jacqueta: Yes!
- Ms. Lee: Good. What's yo name?
- Jacqueta: Jacqueta—
- Ms. Lee: Odd name dat, but okay. Take dis red bandana, put it on yo' head. Take dis badge, and write yo name on it. De City Council make us wear dese tings to identify ourselves now.
- Jacqueta: (*Excited to be asked to help puts on the bandana, and the badge*)
- Ms. Lee: Okay, you're lookin' good now. Take dis basket a wildflowers, special herbs, fresh vegetables, elixirs, and unusual lookin' greenery, and let's see how you carry it.
- Jacqueta: (*Balances the basket after a couple of tries*) Is dis okay?
- Ms. Lee: Good girl! Ya balance dat ting like ya been doin' it all yo life! Now, remember dese rules and you'll be fine. #1 If it grows, sell it. dis means that if someone want somethin'—ya put a price on it and sell it to dem. #2 Don't go inside no one's house. Dey come to de door and

want somethin' ya got—sell it to dem from de steps. #3 Get ya money befo you give up de merchandise—dere are some bad people out dere ya know—and you're new at dis. Ya understand everyting?

Jacqueta: I tink so, yes.

Ms. Lee: All right now, since ya new, I'll send you down de North side of "Meeting" street first—cause dat's de legal side and you don't have to worry about runnin' into Fast Foot Brown.

Jacqueta: Fast who?

Ms. Lee: Oh, don't trouble yourself bout him. He's de policeman hired by the Mayor's office to keep us Flower Ladie's on de right side of de white line. I'll tell you all about dat later. Here's a sack a coins to help you make change. You know how to count money yes?

Jacqueta: Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Lee: Den off you go—and don't take more dan' de sound of de midday bell to get back here—wit de money, and de rest of yo wares.

Jacqueta: What if somethin' happens I can't handle?

Ms. Lee: Yell out girl! Yell out—some of us will come runnin' to help you right away! Don't you know nuthin' bout round here? We stick together, and help each other. And remember, look for de aristocracy cause dat's where de pocketbook is.

As Jacqueta walks off to hawk her wares, and as white people (the only customers they would have had back then) stop at various stands to dialogue with the vendor while making their purchases, police officer nicknamed "fast foot brown" approaches waving his billy club shouting

Foot: Wait a minute girl! Where you goin?

Ms. Lee: None a yo business, Mr. Fast Foot Brown—she helpin' me out today is all and she's not on the wrong side of yo white line so watch where you talkin' ---

- Foot: What you call me woman? You know I hate that name!
- Ms. Lee: Hate it, love it—it's all de same to me and de other street vendors 'round here. Ya just keep trouble goin'
- Foot: I'm not here to interpret the law woman—just to make sure you follow it—no sellin' past this line (*he runs his foot down part of the line for emphasis*) You can still hear, can't you?
- Ms. Lee: Yes, and it's no thanks to you!
- Suddenly he turns around and spies one of the other flower ladies crossin' the line to make a sale and he takes off running after her shoutin'*
- Foot: Stop! Stop! You know you can't cross the line. You're breaking the law. Time in jail and a ten-dollar fine, Time in jail and a ten-dollar fine, if I catch you!
- The street bustles as townspeople get in his way to slow him down—one of them trips him – as the flower lady gets beyond his reach and disappears out of sight. Just as he gets up to continue pursuit judge waring and his wife walk up*
- Judge: Patrolman Davis! What are you doing?
- Foot: (*Stops in his tracks to respond*) Good Day Judge Waring, Mrs. Waring ma'am. Sir, you know very well what I'm doing. I'm upholding the law. You know City Council forbids Flower vendor sales in the business district.
- Mrs. W.: Yes, and we know why too. Race prejudice! Contrary to what City Council and the Mayor's office said about the Flower Ladies contributing to traffic congestion, the real reason is they want to stop successful Negro entrepreneurs from doing something they've done since the 1860s in this town!
- Judge: And that they will continue to do if I have any say in it.
- Foot: Sir, I'm just trying to do my job. I have a wife and children to—

Waring: Save it officer. The day is hot, and we don't need any more hot air around here. You claim to be trying to enforce the law, but I don't see anyone breaking it. I suggest you get back to your station, and quit bothering these women!

Ms. Lee: (*Laughing with several other vendors/townspeople who've stopped to listen and watch.*) That's right Fast Foot Brown, run somewhere and catch a real criminal. I think I see someone over in the next county stealing bread to eat! You better hurry up and catch them.

Foot: You just shut your mouth woman, and pray I never catch you crossing the line. Good day to you Judge. Good day to you ma'am!

He walks off in a huff as the towns people mimic him behind his back and the warings continue talking with Ms. Lee:

Judge: How are sales Ms. Lee?

Ms. Lee: Seen better days, seen much worse sir. We really appreciate your continued support. It means a lot to have someone stand up for us. You too, Mrs. Waring, how are you today ma'am?

Waring: I'm as frustrated and angry as ever with the treatment of Negroes in this town! Your people have contributed so much to this country, and you passed us white folks by long ago spiritually.

Ms. Lee: Hush now ma'am, you give us too much credit.

Waring: No, I won't hush dear, I'm going to speak my mind as long as my body has breath.

Judge: And from the looks of things my body too—My dear don't you think the middle of Meeting Street is a bad place for—

Waring: Wat' you know better than to try to tell me where to speak, how to speak, or—

Judge: Yes, I know, what to say! I'm all ears my dear.

Waring: As I was saying—too many Southern whites continue to act as if the Civil War didn't happen. They are a sick, confused, decadent people. So self-centered, they haven't considered themselves Americans since the end of slavery.

Ms. Lee: (*Looking around nervously*) Ma'am, please don't get yourself in more trouble with your high society friends. As long as we have each other, and work together, nobody will be able to stop us for long.

Judge: We have to be going, dear—the Lee's are expecting us for luncheon.

Waring: Oh, my goodness! Speaking of luncheon, Miss Lee don't forget that you and the other Flower Ladies are invited to tea at my house this Sunday. And the Garden Club of Charleston will need its usual large flower order this week.

Ms. Lee: Tanks' ma'am it will be ready. And nothin' under de sun, could make us forget yo kind invite. See you at 3 o'clock.

Judge: Sharp, you know how she hates tardiness.

Ms. Lee: Yes, sir. Enjoy de rest of de day, and may God continue to bless and keep you.

As the warings walk away, Jacquette returns with an empty basket, jingling coins in the bag Ms. Lee gave her.

Jacquette: Ms. Lee! Ms. Lee! Good news, I sold everything you gave me down to de last little brown twig. My first time out!

Ms. Lee: Well, for one of de few times in me life, I'm actually surprised down to my bare feet! Good work girl! Let me see how much you made.

Jacquette: I've already counted it out ma'am. When I subtract the three dollas in coins you gave me to start wit—I have 10 whole dollas left!

Ms. Lee: TEN DOLLAS!! (*She shouts to the flower lady on the next corner*) You believe dis girl! Dat's more dan' I made all last week ya know.

FL #2: (*Quietly*) Dat's good Lee. I'm glad she was able to help out today. I've been listenin' though to some of de things folks been sayin' about us and what we do and I ask myself how in de world have we made it this far?

Ms. Lee: What you mean by dat?

FL #2: I mean since right after slavery we been makin' our own way in dis foreign land. Some of us ownin' land in the low country, some of us workin' de farms, growin' de crops, and working together so dat when one a us don't have, de other pitch in wit. I'm thinkin' bout all de mornin's we wake up at 3 a.m. to walk de 7 miles or so to the Sappho ferry, wait our turn to board wit our wares and sit in de segregated bottom section, while de white folks take de good spaces and turn up dere noses to us like we catch some kinda disease dat will rub off on dem. We come here and make small talk wit de white folks, some a dem kind to us. We get to know each other in dese little exchanges back and forth but when dusk come, no one other than de Warings want anyting' to do wit us. We all go back to our homes, as separate as de fingers on de hand.

Jacqueta: When de city started de new law, why didn't you all just go somewhere else to sell?

FL #2: And "why" should we? We been here almost 80 years now, takin' up de places on dese streets, year after year. Sellin' good quality merchandise to de white people for a fare price not botherin' nobody.

Ms. Lee: True dat. Me, I just wish white people would make up their minds. First dey drag us from our homeland, to work on de plantations for nothin', den when freedom come, dey want us to disappear like dew on de grass—as if we were never here—

F.L. #2: But we say no! We say it wit our bodies, our feet carryin us on to dat ferry day after day in spite of laws, in spite of de hateful tings some of dem say to our faces, in spite of havin' to wear red rags on our heads and name badges—we just keep comin' same way each day—to sell de wares dat keep us and our families from starvin'.

Ms. Lee: Many people don't know dis but we Flower Ladies are de first Negro business folks in Charleston.

Jacqueta: De first?

Ms. Lee: You heard right. And it was no easy ting—to decide or do—and we no goin' nowhere, no time soon either—When Fast Foot Brown come after one-a us—the rest of us help stop him, while dat person get away.

FL #2: And so far, even though de law has been around for almost all of 1944, not one-a us has spent a day in jail, or paid even a dolla in fines.

Ms. Lee: And we have Judge Waring—

F.L #2: May God bless him and his unto de 4th generation—

Ms. Lee: Amen—and his wife to thank for dat. Girl, do you know what de white folks 'round here call him and his wife?

Jacqueta: No ma'am.

FL #2: They call them Nigger lovin' traitors' girl. And dat's not all.

Ms. Lee: For true—some time de Klan pay dem visits. Dey burn crosses on dere lawns, break out dere windows wit rocks, and curse dem to dere faces, mostly in de middle of de night.

FL #2: But it don't stop dem. Dy just keep on doin' what's right. No matter what. I don't know why in de world dey care so much about us but--

Ms. Lee: Dey care because to hate somebody cause of de color of dere skin is wrong—it's hateful against God, and de Warings is God lovin' people.

FL #2: Why don't we ask at de next Sweetgrass basket makin' gatherin' if somebody wants to create a pattern and name it after dem?

Jacqueta: Sweetgrass basket—what's dat?

Ms. Lee: What did you just take down from yo head girl? Dat's what—a basket made from de palmetto leaves—like de ones dat grow back home in Sierra Leone—We make dem wit our own hands to carry tings, to look pretty in de white folks' houses—

F.L. #2: And to make money for our families. In fact, we're havin' another gatherin' dis afternoon—why don't you come girl and join us?

Jacqueta: Can I Ms. Lee? I'd love too?

Ms. Lee: Can an ox see his behind in de woods? Course you can. We'll have a fine time too—gossipin' and listenin' to de elders tell stories bout long time ago, dancin' – plenty of fun to go round – and we work together in a circle to get de baskets made too.

Jacqueta: Den I'd love to come with you ma'am. I can't wait to meet everyone.

Ms. Lee: Den let's get back to work girl, de evenin' is a long time off, and dere's plenty a work to do. Here, let us teach you de Flower Lady song. It will help you get more customers when you go to Broad Street.

Ms. Lee and F.L. #2 begins teaching her as the townspeople continue about their business. We hear some shout “fast foot brown’s a comin’” as the stage fades to black.

Sankofa: In spite of race prejudice, and the political pressure that raised it's ugly head periodically to try and rid Charleston of its Flower Ladies, they remain an integral part of street enterprise in a city that continues to acknowledge them as Charleston's oldest African American entrepreneurs.

Scene V: Education the Way to the Light

Characters:

Michael: Student Researcher

Mrs. John: Teacher

Students: Various

Year 1862, image the Penn Normal, industrial and agricultural school, located on the oaks plantation, St. Helena's island. Text for screen: “following the insurrection of 9-19-1739 in the stono community when Africans killed 20 white men, women and children using guns and knives “the negro code of 1740” in So. Carolina made it illegal to educate blacks.

Image this would a good place for a short slide show of images about the Penn school and how it progressed from 1862 to 1948 this is the focus year for this scene because the school closed in 1948 and became the Penn community services center

Michael: Until we started this unit, I never realized how important education was to slaves and freed slaves. Though my grandmother used to tell me stories about growing up in the South, and walking miles and miles to get to a school that was raggedy, with few books, and not enough heat—I never realized how much all Black people valued education. Anyway, I’m supposed to find out about the Penn School—the oldest school in the Gullah region.

As Micheal begins his research the audience hears the sound of a school bell, calling the students to school. As the bell rings students in 1948 (the last year the school existed) start walking onto the school grounds from various directions. The teacher enters the staging area last with Michael a “new” student in tow

Mrs. John: Good morning class!

All: Good morning Mrs. John!

Mrs. John: Time to come to order. We have a lot to do today, and a new student to welcome.

Michael: Good—

Mrs. John: Young man, did you see my mouth move to ask you to speak?

All: *(Giggling, laughing quietly)*

Mrs. John: *(Lightly)* And what do you children find so funny? Keep

All: Nothing, Mrs. John!

Mrs. John: Then as I was saying, class I want you to welcome this young man. His name is Michael, and he's from a city way up north called Cleveland, Ohio.

All: Hello Michael. Welcome! *(Applause)*

Mrs. John: Michael, you'll have an opportunity to talk later. Right now, take that empty seat in the back of the class and pay attention.

As Michael moves back to take his seat, Mrs. John continues

Mrs. John: Who can tell me what today's lesson is all about?

(Several hands raise.)

S1: That's easy Mrs. John, it's all about the history of Penn School, our school—one of the first African American schools in the south, the—

Mrs. John: Fantastic, thank you young man, that's enough for now. I'll see how much you all know a little later. Who would like to lead us in prayer?

S2: Oo, I would Mrs. John, can I?

Mrs. John: Of course, you may but make it short—there's much to do!

S2: *(Everyone bows their heads)* Lord Bless this day, and all within the sound of my voice. Keep us safe, and help us remember to honor our history, to love and support each other and to make our families proud.

All: Amen!

Mrs. John: Now, let's come together in our circle of unity to recite the Lord's Prayer.

All:

The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures
he leadeth me beside the still waters
He restorest my soul, he leadeth me in the paths
of righteousness for his name's sake
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence
of mine enemies, thou anointest my head with oil,
my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house
of the Lord forever.

Mrs. John: Excellent children. Nice and loud, respectful to the Lord, and not recited too fast, like yesterday.

All: Thank you Mrs. John!

Mrs. John: Normally, we'd have the pledge of allegiance next, Michael, but since it's such a cold morning, I think we'll skip to my favorite part of the morning, our beloved song written by the late Quaker poet, John Green Leaf Whittier back in 1862. Since it's freezing in here class, let's do our movement to the music in a moving circle instead of in place. Someone give Michael their copy so he can sing along with us.

A lively rendition of the hymn is shared while the students do praise dance-type movement in a circle that moves slowly around the room

Saint Helena Hymn

Oh, none in all the world before

Were ever glad as we!
We're free on Carolina's shore,
We're all at home and free.

Thou Friend and Helper of the poor,
Who suffered for our sake,
To open every prison door
And every yoke to break!

Bend low Thy pitying face and mild,
And help us sing and pray;
The hand that blessed the little child
Upon our foreheads lay.

We hear no more the driver's horn,
No more the whip we fear,
This holy day that saw Thee born
Was never half so dear.

The very oaks are greener clad,
The waters brighter smile;
Oh, never shone a day so glad
On sweet St. Helena's Isle.

We praise Thee in our songs today,
To Thee in prayer we call,
Make swift the feet and straight the way
Of freedom unto all.

As the song ends everyone begins clapping as they return quickly to their seats, to prepare for the lesson

Mrs. John: Who can tell me why it's important to know our history?

Student: Because if you don't know your history, you can't know where you're going in life.

Mrs. John: That's good, but can someone say it better?

Michael: Our history tells us how our ancestors wound up in America, the struggles they had to go through for freedom, and the importance of taking advantage of every opportunity to educate ourselves.

Mrs. John: Better, Michael, excellent in fact! I can see you're going to be a wonderful addition to our learning community.

Teasing sounds from some of the students until Mrs. John cuts her eye at them – then silence

Mrs. John: Who can tell me why our school was started and by whom?

Student: It was started by northern missionaries in 1862 right after the battle of Port Royal, as part of the Port Royale Experiment—

Mrs. John: Which was what?

Student: An experiment to help our slave ancestors make the transition from slavery to freedom by learning to read, write, and a lot of other things they needed to know.

Mrs. John: Yes! We're on a roll class—now this is a hard one—how many students did the first class have back then?

All: Nine!

Mrs. John: (*Surprised*) And their gender?

All: (*Silence*)

Michael: They were all women!

Mrs. John: Yes, Michael that's right. And what was the school known as by our community?

Student: As the Light to the Islands, because education is the way to the light of freedom!

Mrs. John: Very good. A couple more correct answers, and you all will get to have

an early and long lunch today. Okay, who can tell me what we expect from Penn School graduates?

Student: Aw, that's easy Mrs. John, you tell us this almost everyday. Heck, it's even on a sign above your desk.

Mrs. John: And the answer is?

Student: Oh, sorry—self-determination, self-pride, and pride in and responsibility toward one's community.

Mrs. John: Yes—community, is the key word here. Class, if you don't remember anything I've taught you this year, which I know you will because you are bright, intelligent children—the most important lesson I can teach you is to remember to stick together, support each other, and respect yourselves always. Something that's not said enough in these trying days of Jim Crow is how important it is to remember our history. It wasn't easy, it wasn't pretty, and it wasn't fun—but we made it by making connections between the weather, plant life, and spirituality here with what we knew from back home. Instead of holding our heads down to the ground and thinking "Oh, woe is me, I'm not going to make it" – we held them up and proud knowing that God never puts anything on us we can't handle. We are a brilliant, resilient, loving people and don't any of you ever forget that!

All: Yes, Mrs. John!

Mrs. John: Okay, children let's have another song, in honor of our Michael's first day with us, followed by an early lunchtime. What we will we sing?

Student: How about "We Shall Overcome?"

Mrs. John: Okay, come up here and lead it off—everyone stand at your desks, and we'll sing it together.

Student (will add names later) comes up front and leads the class in song. At the end of it – stage darkens – end of Scene V

Scene VI: The Lesson Ends

Ms. Anderson: Classroom Teacher

Akil: Slavery/Rice Research

Misha: Seeking Research

Jacqueta: Commerce in Charleston/Flower Ladies

Michael: The Penn School

Students: Classroom Participants

Back in Ms. Anderson's lively, learning-community-based history classroom. Music for today is James Brown's "say it loud" students enter loud, typical high school student banter, including teasing and wise cracks. After a few students have entered, Jacqueta enters carrying a sweet grass basket filled with fruit/flowers etc., singing the flower lady jingle:

Jacqueta: "My name is Yuh Go Annie. Got my garden on my head. Flowers Da is looking mighty fine. Fresh from the vine."

Julie: (*Entering already in classroom laughing*) You are who? and you got what on your head? Jacqueta, are you kidding?

Jacqueta: (*Repeating the jingle louder replacing "Annie" with the students name*) "My name is Yuh Go Julie. Got my garden on my head. Flowers Da is looking mighty fine. Fresh from the vine."

Julie: (*Approaches Jacqueta and acts like she's going to knock the basket off of her head. Jacqueta takes the basket down and tries to get Julie to carry it. Just then Akil enters carrying a sweet grass basket filled with rice. He's with a couple of other young men*)

Akil: (*Singing*) "All day long we work so hard, till the sun is goin' down, workin' on the highways and by-ways and wearin', wearin' a frown, you hear dem—

Student: Dag, Akil you can't sing man, will you be quiet before I have to get some ear plugs?

Student #2: No lie! Why are both you and Jacqueta carrying those baskets anyway?

Akil & Jacq: None-a your business! (*They give each other high fives and make a wish because they said something at the same time*)

Sev. Students: (*All talking at the same time*) Aw what you mean
none-a your business! I'll come over there and pop you upside your head
and make it my business! Ya'll better be quiet with
this mess before Ms. Anderson gets in here. ETC. ETC.

In the midst of this chaos, Misha enters quietly with a calm, religious look on her face. She's wearing a white cloth on her head and all white clothing and holds her hands in prayer position. Everyone falls silent and watches as she walks slowly to her desk. Then her best friend bursts out laughing:

Jacqueta: (*Laughing hysterically*) Girrrrrl Misha what the heck
happened to you girlfriend? Did you lose your mind while you
were doing your research?

Misha: Huh? What you say Jacqueta?

Jacqueta: I "SAID" what's up? Why are you acting so funny?

Ms.

Anderson: (*Entering at the moment and turning off the music*) What's funny? Let me say this loud like James Brown (*voice louder*) What are ya'll doing this morning? Hurry up and sit down, the bell will be ringing in a minute!

Just then Michael enters as the bell rings carrying a flashlight he has positioned under his chin. It casts light on his face and on the ceiling

Michael: Good morning Ms. Anderson. How was your weekend?

Ms.

Anderson: I had an excellent weekend Michael, and I can see you brought something to show and tell as part of your research report today yes?

Student: I was wondering what that was—looks like he's trying to experience what it's like to be a ghost or something!

All: *(Laughing and making teasing comments to Michael)*

Ms.

Anderson: I'll ghost you young man, if you don't get quiet up in my classroom. All right class, come to order!

Class quiets down as everyone takes their seats

Ms.

Anderson: Since today's class period's been shortened because of the assembly this afternoon, let's go right into our community circle.
Who would like to lead it?

Akil raises his hand

Ms.

Anderson: Okay, Akil. Everyone get into our circle.

Akil: "We come together" "to learn about our ancestors" "and love ourselves," "we will respect each other," "help each other" "and always do our best!" THREE POWER CLAPS ON THREE
1, 2, 3 (*CLAP, CLAP, CLAP!*).

Ms.

Anderson: That sounded so good, thanks Akil. Now, how many of you completed your reading assignments?

Tommy: Was that supposed to be done by today?

Ms.

Anderson: Tommy, why is it you are the "only" one who never seems to get the due dates right for our assignments?

All laughing and making smart remarks

Ms.

Anderson: *(Stern look and head snap)* I "know" nobody else is making a sound when I asked this young man a question!

Tommy: Sorry, Ms. Anderson. I don't know what's wrong with me. I think I still need my mama to remind me about homework, but this year, she told me I needed to start being responsible for keeping track of my own deadlines—and

Ms.

Anderson: And nothing Tommy—and get busy and make that happen.

Tommy: Okay, okay, Ms. Anderson I will.

All: *(Kissing sounds to indicate kissing up to the teacher)*

Ms.

Anderson: *(Laughing)* All right, all right. That's enough—let's re-focus and get to work. *(Pause)* I'm excited about today's lesson because we get a chance to hear what our group leaders Akil, Misha, Jacqueta, and Michael learned during their research into their individual topics. Who'd like to begin?

All four raise their hand at the same time

Ms.

Anderson: Okay, okay. Since it appears to be a tie. Let's go in chronological order. First, we'll hear from Akil, next Misha, then Jacqueta, then Michael.

Akil approaches the front of the class carrying a sweetgrass basket of white rice as if it's something precious

Akil: I was to learn about the beginning of slavery and growing rice in the Gullah region, and to note some of the areas other group members could dig more deeply into.

Student: So, what are our sub-topics Akil?

Ms.

Anderson: Will you wait a minute, and let Akil finish. You know better.

AKIL: *(Clearing throat sounds)* Like I was saying, I learned that the white rice in this sweet grass basket is not white when it starts out—it's brown. I

learned that our W. African ancestors were brought to the Gullah region because of their expertise in growing rice, a crop the white slave masters couldn't figure out how to grow.

Ms.

Anderson: Wait a minute, young man, back up a bit. First our ancestors had to get here before they could do anything. Where was the point of arrival in the Gullah region?

Akil: Sorry, Ms. Anderson, I figured everyone would have read about that over the weekend. The point of arrival was Sullivan's Island—considered by many the Black Ellis Island because this is where hundreds of thousands of slaves were sold. Anyway, the main thing I want to share is how powerful it was to spend so much time finding out about the way our ancestors made it. How in they worked together as a close, African community by sharing their amazing ability to grow rice under horrible mud, water, and mosquito filled conditions. I learned about their artistic ability to make sweetgrass baskets, of how they kept responding to race hatred with love for each other—looking forward to the day when they'd once again be free!

On the word free akil starts taking up handfuls of rice and tossing it into the air. None of the students are hit by it but they take this as a signal to begin applauding

Ms.

Anderson: (*Walking to the front of the class applauding too*) Thank you Akil excellent job! Next up Misha!

Misha: (*Begins singing Mary Don't You Weep from her desk and continues as she slowly walks up front. she finishes the song—then continues*) My research was all about how our African ancestors continued a ritual called “seeking” after they got here. Seeking means to find God by spending time in the wilderness of the woods, from midnight until dawn. I learned that an elder known as a seeking mother or seeking father guides the person through the process. It’s like the real wilderness of the woods is the same as as the wilderness of a spirit or soul that hasn’t developed a relationship with God yet.

Ms.

Anderson: What's all of the white about Misha?

Misha: Well, I'm wearing white first because the seeking person had to wear a white cloth on their head and second because you had to go into the wilderness every night at midnight "until" you saw something or someone in white.

Student: And what did seeing something or someone in white mean?

Misha: It meant you'd come through the wilderness and found God. It meant you were ready to be baptized. It meant you were ready for the seeking mother or father to teach you the questions and answers from the bible you'd need to pass the oral test at the Church you wanted to join.

Ms.

Anderson: Very good Misha. Now even though you're a Muslim, what's the most important thing you learned?

Misha: I learned that no matter what name we use for him God is real. I used to sit in the Mosque and listen to our leader, counting the minutes until it was over and I could get out to do things that were more fun. I didn't understand how important faith was to the survival of our ancestors. Now I know that without our faith we never would have made it. That Allah or God is not someone you think about in your house of worship—He's part of who you are 24/7—I'll never be the same Ms. Anderson! Thank you for giving my group this assignment.

Ms.

Anderson: Thanks a lot Misha. Sounds like you had a spiritual, research experience. Next up, Jacqueta!

Picks up her basket and balances it on her head at her desk. She walks carefully to the front of the class singing the flower lady jingle

Jacqueta: My name is Yuh Go Annie. Got my garden on my head. Flowers Da is looking mighty fine. Fresh from the vine.

Student: What in the world are you singing?

Jacqueta: (*With attitude*) If ya'll will give me a minute you'll find out.

Ms.

Anderson: Now hush up and let her continue!

Jacqueta: After the Civil War battle of Port Royal in January of 1862, most of the white plantation owners left the low country region to escape. So, many of our ancestors in the Gullah region had a chance to buy up the abandoned land and start their own farms. In this way, they were able to enjoy the freedom of land ownership while maintaining many of their African customs, and helping each other be successful as free men and women.

Student: You mean they weren't all sharecroppers working for white folks?

Jacqueta: Nope. As a matter of fact, they were so good at handling their business—a group of African women got the idea to try and start doing business with the white folks in Charleston.

Ms.

Anderson: Do you know why it was the women and not the men?

Jacqueta: Not yet, Ms. Anderson. Anyway, I was excited to learn that these powerful women were known as Flower Ladies, and not long after the end of slavery, they started taking the ferry boat into the city of Charleston each day to sell their flowers, vegetables, wild herbs, and elixirs to the white folks.

Student: Charleston was segregated back then? How were they able to do it without being put in jail, attacked or killed?

Jacqueta: Good question. There were two reasons 1) They were a stubborn, determined, group who refused to take no as an answer—

Ms.

Anderson: And what was the second reason?

Jacqueta: The second reason was because of the help and support of a few white people. Especially Judge Waring and his wife who bent over backwards to help whenever they could.

Ms.

Anderson: Good job Jacqueta. Now what's the most important thing you learned?

Jacqueta: I learned that if we work together as a people toward a common goal, we can do anything we put our minds to. The Flower Ladies of Charleston, were businesswomen who didn't take no for an answer—in fact, their motto was “If it grows—sell it!”

Ms.

Anderson: Thanks a lot, Jacqueta. Now, last but not least Michael!

Michael: (*Approaches holding the flashlight under his chin*) “Oh, none in all the world before, were ever glad as we!
We're free on Carolina's shore, We're all at home and free.”

That's the beginning of the “Saint Helena Hymn” written by John Greenleaf Whittier upon the request of Charlotte Forten, first Black instructor at Penn School, one of the first African American schools in the country.

Student: Why is that song so important?

Michael: Because all good schools need a song—something to remind why education is so important.

Ms.

Anderson: Okay, Michael—now you've made it a point to bring a flashlight to class. What is the significance of the light?

Michael: Thanks for asking Ms. Anderson. This light represents what the most important lesson I've learned so far during this research. That education more than money, land, more than anything I could own is the light of freedom and hope! At the end of slavery many of our slave ancestors believed education was the way to a good life. This is why the Penn School became known as “A Light to the Islands.”

Ms.

Anderson: Michael, we're almost at the end of this period. Can you quickly share the most important lesson you've learned so far before I give the other students a quick oral quiz?

Michael: Yes, I learned that education is even more important than I thought it was. Before I started this research, my plan was to finish high school then go to Morehouse to earn my undergraduate degree.

Ms.

Anderson: And now?

Michael: Shoot! Now, I'm planning to go all the way, Ms. Anderson. All the to becoming a doctor of Education. I want to spend the rest of my life encouraging other Black children to go to school to learn all they can, about everything they can!

He flashes the flashlight around the room on the faces of his peers

Student: Okay, okay—dag, we get your point. Education is the light of the world—now turn that flashlight off!

Ms.

Anderson: And you became the teacher when? Now, group leaders join Michael in the front of the class so we can applaud your efforts.

The other three join Michael and the class applauds until they've returned to their seats

Ms.

Anderson: Okay, now let's lend with a Q&A period.

Ms. Anderson asks each of the following questions. Selecting one student to respond to each question.

1. Which South Carolina island was a major point of arrival for W. African Slaves?

Ans: Sullivan's Island

2. What product led South Carolina to seek the knowledge and skills of specific slaves from West Africa?

Ans: Rice

3. Who were the Gullah street vendors who challenged Jim Crow in Charleston, South Carolina?

Ans: Flower Ladies

4. What was the process a person had to go through to become a member of the church?

Ans: Seeking

5. What does the word Sankofa mean?

Ans: One must return to the past in order to move forward.

6. What baskets made by Gullah men and women are examples of West African culture and traditions?

Ans: Sweet Grass Baskets

7. What was the first school African Americans started with the help of white missionaries after the Battle of Port Royal in 1862?

Ans: The Penn School

Just as she finishes the last question, the bell rings

Ms.

Anderson: Class dismissed!

LAST VISUAL IMAGE: POEM BY RONALD DAISE:
HAVE MS. ANDERSON INSTRUCT ENTIRE CLASS TO SAY OUT LOUD

Forgotten Moments

Only few remember.
A history of a people has been hushed, been stilled—
Yet only few weep.
Only few sing the old songs
Or recall precious moments.
Time, progress and shortsightedness are silencing a heritage!
Precious memories, though,
Are like the lyrics of old slave songs.
They should not be
Stored up
In the minds of
A few.
They should linger—
From generation to generation—
Lending meaning to the past,
Nurturing strength and hope
For the future.