School Matinee Series • Study Guide

Camille A. Brown and Dancers

*ink*

Thu • April 4 • 10 am
Welcome to the Hop

A performance needs an audience, so be prepared to play your part!

Theater Etiquette

When entering the Hopkins Center, show consideration for all those sharing the building by remaining quiet and respectful in common areas.

Be aware and use quiet voices. Remember that live theater differs greatly from watching television or movies or attending a sporting event. Live performers can hear and see you and are easily distracted by any talking or moving around in the audience. Even the smallest sounds can be heard throughout the theater, so it’s best to be quiet so that everyone can enjoy the performance. Applause is the best way to show your enthusiasm and appreciation!

Important to remember: Backpacks, food, drink, and gum are not allowed in the theater. Please turn off all cell phones and note that recording the performance or taking any photos is strictly prohibited. Hats off! It is respectful to remove hats during your time in the theater.

Information for Teachers

Prepare—review this study guide for context that will help your students engage with the performance. Check in with the Hop if you have any questions or concerns about content. Read the email that accompanies this guide—Hop staff often request details about your visit including how many buses you’ll be bringing and what accommodations you need.

Arrive—arrive 30 minutes prior to start time to allow time for Hop staff to check you in and escort the students to their seats. Hop staff will ask you for a head count of students. Please review our bus policy before arrival: hop.dartmouth.edu/online/plan_a_successful_visit

Lunch—sometimes we are able to offer a space for schools to eat bag lunches following the show. Check the email that accompanies this guide to confirm. If staying for lunch, please confirm with Hop staff one week prior to show. The day of the show, please bring lunches in boxes or tubs labeled with the school’s name. Hop staff will take lunches to the lunch space and escort school group there following the show. Schools are responsible for calling their own bus back to the Hop when they are ready to leave.

Ticketing Policy—no tickets are issued for school matinee performances. Seating placement for each school group is determined by Hop staff. Please let them know if you have a seating request or accommodation; we do our best to keep each school group seated together. Payment is required 30 days before the performance regardless of whether all students are able to attend on the day of the show—please feel free to bring extra chaperones or school staff to fill any empty seats.

Photography—though photography by the audience is prohibited, the Hopkins Center may take photographs during the performance for use on our website or other promotional materials. If you or your students do not wish to be photographed, please let Hop staff know.

The Show Must Go On!—we do not cancel events due to school closings for inclement weather. Performances will only be cancelled if the artist is unable to reach the theater. Schools will be notified by phone if this occurs. We do not issue refunds for performances missed due to school closure. Please contact Hop staff if you find your school unable to attend for this reason.

This study guide was created by the Hop’s Outreach and Arts Education team. To download copies of this and other guides, visit hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach

Special thanks to Brandea Turner, Hop Events Manager, for her contributions and help with this guide.

Enjoy the Show!

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The Hopkins Center Outreach and Arts Education department embodies the Hop’s mission to “ignite and sustain a passion for the arts.” It provides Dartmouth, the community and beyond rare personal contact with artists and a broad context for the performing arts. Unveiling the creative process of extraordinarily diverse artists, Outreach programs touch more than 14,000 lives each year.

Did You Know?

• The Hopkins Center opened in 1962.
• The Hopkins Center was designed by Wallace Harrison, architect of Lincoln Center and the United Nations Building in New York City.
• In The Moore Theater, the area over the stage, called the “fly loft,” is 63 feet tall.
About the Show

Using an amalgamation of African American social dance with African, tap, jazz, modern and hip-hop dance, *ink* celebrates the rituals, gestural vocabulary and traditions ingrained within the lineage of the African diaspora, people of African descent living outside of the continent. By examining the parts of black life that are often appropriated, rewritten or silenced, *ink* seeks to reclaim African Americans’ narratives. The dance is accompanied by an original score, played live onstage during the performance. The rhythms and sounds of Western, traditional African and handmade instruments provide a soundtrack that complements the dance and propels these stories of the African American experience forward.

More about the show from Camille A. Brown, company founder, dancer and choreographer:

“Through these works I am striving to show that Black people are not stereotypes or tropes. We cannot and will not stand to be boxed into one category. We have multiple layers and dimensions that express our shared humanity. It is my hope that the trilogy* contributes to the ongoing discussion about race and gender in our society, and also opens the minds of those who are willing to learn more about African and African American cultures and the indelible history written into our souls.

As I began to develop the work, I had this idea of the dancers representing superheroes, but couldn’t understand why that was in my thoughts. I knew that I didn’t necessarily want us to wear capes, but I had this strong sense there was a place for this concept. When I read *Question Bridge: Black Males in America* one of the men interviewed said, “I see Black people as comic book heroes because they always keep rising.” That was it! It is about showing that in our basic survival and natural attributes—we have “superhuman” powers, powers to adapt, to overcome and to transform within an often-hostile environment.”

Camille A. Brown wrote the following descriptions of each section in *ink* from the perspective of choreographer and dancer:

**the rev up** | Super Power: Heritage

*the rev up* sets up the ritual and clears the path for these stories to be told. I feel like I am stirring a pot of stew and each go-round I keep pulling out more gestures, more groove, more pain and more work.

**Milkshake** | Super Power: The Butt

*Milkshake* celebrates the Black female body through the story of a daughter who is now a woman and celebrates one of her many assets that has been objectified and appropriated.
Balance | Super Power: Love

Balance represents the shared energy between a man and a woman. Often men and women are put into very specific roles—the man as the protector/provider and the woman as the nurturer. In Balance, these roles are interchangeable. Through their mannerisms and gestures, you see the story of how they meet, court, lift, care, protect and, most importantly, love each other.

Turf | Super Power: The Dab

Turf is about brotherhood and tells the story of two Black men from boyhood to manhood. They are claiming their turf in society, home and life. Through it all, they walk the path together—protecting each other.

Migration | Super Power: Spirituality

Migration is about how our bodies hold energy and how we transfer that energy to someone else. What happens when someone holds the space for you to exhale?

Migration II | Super Power: The Ancestors

Migration II connects the lines between African rituals and African American rituals. Our stories live within “the circle of the bantaba”—the dancing ground—and the “dab”—a greeting with the hands that takes on many forms. Through relationships, friendships and spirituality, we use the powers of the past and present to propel us into the future.

About the Artist

Led by dancer/choreographer Camille A. Brown, Camille A. Brown and Dancers is recognized for its introspective approach to cultural themes through visceral movement and socio-political dialogues. Known for high-theatricality, gutsy moves and virtuosic musicality, the company explores a range of themes that connect past and present, excavating ancestral stories as well as immediate contemporary issues. Theater, poetry, visual art and music of all genres merge to inject each performance with energy and urgency.

Meet the dancers and learn more about the company at: vimeo.com/230196621

Brown is a prolific choreographer who, in addition to her work with her company also choreographs for Broadway, Off-Broadway and television. Recent choreography for Broadway includes A Streetcar Named Desire, Once on This Island and tick, tick...BOOM! starring Lin-Manuel Miranda. She also choreographed Jesus Christ Superstar Live for NBC in 2018. Camille got her start as a dancer by doing impromptu choreography to the theme songs of cartoons, and watching scenes from her favorite movie musicals over and over again.

See Camille’s choreography for Once on This Island at www.theatermania.com/broadway/news/once-on-this-island-video_83260.html

Actors rehearse Camille’s choreography for the live broadcast of Jesus Christ Superstar
Social Dance

Though not many people want to be professional dancers, many people like to dance informally with their friends. Doing the Dougie or Cabbage Patch may not be considered high art, according to Western European norms, but it is an important way to connect with others through a shared experience. As a choreographer, Camille A. Brown intentionally incorporates these informal social dances into her storytelling. One reason Camille values social dance is that it has deep roots in American slavery. When slaves were not permitted to speak, they used their bodies to communicate. The rhythms created by the stomping of feet and clapping of hands gave voice to a community that was rendered speechless by oppression. Dance was also used to subvert the power of slave owners. The cakewalk was an elaborate dance in which slaves exaggerated—and mocked—the formal dance moves of their masters. Slave owners were ignorant of the intent, and the dance provided a way for slaves to assume brief authority over their circumstances. Social dance also reflected the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the United States. Dances with African names like Watusi and Boogaloo demonstrated and proclaimed pride in Africa and African American heritage. Dance continues to be an important part of African American social life, whether at casual family picnics or larger community gatherings. These dance forms—old and new—lend deep authenticity to Camille’s storytelling on stage.

Black Performance in Dance

Camille A. Brown tells stories of the African American experience through movement and music. Almost all the pieces she does with her dancers explore racial identity, stereotypes and appropriation. Though she draws immensely from her own lived experience, Camille also deeply researches the themes in her dances. *ink* is the final dance in a trilogy that explores specific themes around the experience of being black in America. The first dance in the trilogy, *Mr. TOL. E RANCe*, examines stereotypes of black people in the media, past and present. Camille was inspired to do this work by observing the way African Americans are portrayed on reality TV and in Spike Lee’s movie *Bamboozled*. The film follows a black film executive trying to raise awareness of racism by creating a modern-day minstrel show; instead of causing outrage, the show is a hit. Minstrel shows were traveling performances on the vaudeville circuit in the early 20th century that often depicted singing, dancing African Americans as lazy, slow and happy to be slaves. Since African Americans were not allowed to perform, white performers would paint their faces with burnt cork or greasepaint—a form of make-up known as blackface—and depict black people in ways that inaccurately depicted their living conditions and circumstances. Black people were eventually allowed to perform on vaudeville stages, though only if they continued playing established stereotypes, including wearing blackface.

The next dance piece in the trilogy, *Black Girl: Linguistic Play*, explores what it means to be a black girl, using the gestures of childhood play. Feeling frustrated with the female stereotypes she experienced every day, as well as with the lack of media showcasing African American girls being girls, Camille sought to create a piece that clearly communicated the brilliance, intelligence and sass of young, black females. As she worked on the piece, she dug deep into her memory, unearthing her personal experience as a child playing games such as Double Dutch, Red Light/Green Light and hand-clapping games. Camille also incorporated her experience with a society that artificially accelerates African American children into adulthood—boys are
afforded no leniency in courts of law and girls are often hyper-sexualized. Camille’s choreography and storytelling fights against these tropes by showing that black girls are girls. They don’t have to be angry, they don’t have to be strong; they can simply play.

In *ink*, Camille continues to process and examine stereotypes of black people, though she seeks to turn each one on its head, showing the positive trait inside what is often portrayed negatively. She sees these positive interpretations as super powers, celebrating and reclaiming the power of black culture. The desire for reclamation comes from a history of cultural appropriation in the African American community. Appropriation refers to someone casually adopting important hallmarks of another, often minority, culture. As part of the dominant culture, white people may not stop to consider the deeper meaning ascribed to clothing, jewelry, language, even parts of the body, by another culture. When the meaningful symbols of one’s minority heritage are used in an exploitative fashion, something beautiful can become an insult. One example is wearing blackface as a costume. Though blackface was a performance style accepted in society when it was first conceived, the African American community has made clear that today it is an affront to generations of enslavement and suffering. People may mean no harm in their actions, but still cause harm. As such, it is important to keep in mind the ways in which culture and power can be manipulated. *ink* explores how this power can be claimed by people of color, and how communities and individuals can claim power through both ancestral and contemporary vocabularies.

Music and Appropriation

African singer and cultural icon Angelique Kidjo recently addressed cultural appropriation in music when interviewed about her newest album, a cover of the 1983 Talking Heads album *Remain in Light*:

“From the moment you give credit to the people who inspire you, and you don’t copy their songs, it’s not cultural appropriation, it’s cultural expression. When you blatantly take a song and put your name on it, that is not cultural appropriation—it’s stealing! If you recognize where it came from, no problem. It’s not cultural appropriation to me when you acknowledge it.”

Read the entire interview with Angelique Kidjo at: pitchfork.com/thepitch/angelique-kidjo-interview-myth-of-cultural-appropriation-covering-remain-in-light
Pre-performance discussion questions

• Do you think dance is a good medium for learning? Why or why not?

• Of the different dance styles listed in the first paragraph of this guide, which are you most interested in seeing performed? How do you think the styles may be remixed to create something new? Do you think the music will sound familiar or different?

• Do you dance socially? Why or why not?

• What has been your experience with cultural appropriation? What makes this topic difficult to understand and discuss?

Post-performance discussion questions

• How did you see social dance portrayed on stage? Were there moments you wanted to get up and dance?

• Did ink teach you anything about African American culture? What might you still have to learn about African American traditions? Why is it important to learn them?

• Did you see a difference between the six sections of ink? In what way do you think the performance reflected the notes from Camille A. Brown about each piece?

• Do you think dance is a good medium for telling stories about race, gender and culture? Why or why not?

Learning Activities

Super Power: Fighting Stereotypes (grades 9 – 10)
Pose the question to your class: what are the stereotypes of your community? Think in small terms—your school, your street, your village—as well as larger ones—your state, your country: how do others assume you will talk and act in each of these settings? Ask the class to compile a list of stereotypes that they may have experienced or witnessed. As a class, discuss the negative effects of these stereotypes. How do stereotypes and judgments made by others shape the way we think about ourselves and our identities? How does it affect the way we see and interact with the world? Consider if there are any positive impacts from stereotypes. Think of people you know who defy the stereotypes you have listed. How could that person change someone’s perception of a stereotype? Ask each student to pick one stereotype to focus on, and find an example of someone who defies it. Choose a creative way to share that story. Students might create a poster, a video, write a short story or create a movement piece that demonstrates the power of defying stereotypes.

History of Social Dance (grades 9 – 12)
Many of the dance moves in ink are derived and inspired from dance moves popular in social dance settings throughout history. Using the video below, have students identify a type of social dance that interests them. Ask them to research it, finding as much information as they can about the origin of the dance style, where and when it was used and by whom. Have students present their findings and, as part of the presentation, teach the rest of the class the dance—ask students to bring in music, or provide appropriate songs from a teacher-approved playlist. After the presentations, ask students to compare and contrast the dance moves. Do they have a favorite? Do they still have questions about some of the dances? What makes dancing fun? What makes it uncomfortable? What is the difference between dancing on stage and dancing at a party? www.ted.com/talks/camille_a_brown_a_visual_history_of_social_dance_in_25_moves
Stereotypes in Media (grades 9 – 12)

Pair up students and have them spend 1 – 2 minutes brainstorming examples of what constitutes stereotypes in film, television and print media. Have them write down their ideas, whether broad or specific.

After brainstorming, watch an excerpt of a blackface minstrelsy performance from Yes Sir, Mr. Bones (1951):
www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfiNT6AKG0s&list=PLLcvsiOf2J9-yiLeXMQ6p515ieWQTwFZe&index=11

Discuss the clip with students. In what ways is this clip offensive? Why might white audiences in the early 20th century have found this entertaining? What do you think African Americans may have felt? What has changed to make this type of performance no longer acceptable?

Next, have students watch a clip from Disney’s Dumbo (1941): www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXqd5d-zHMQ

In small groups, ask students to compare and contrast these two clips, keeping track of their observations on chart paper or by other means. How is African American culture stereotyped and/or appropriated in these clips: clothing, speech patterns, appearance, movement, relationship with music? What is the difference between the animated and the live performance? In what ways do these portrayals of African Americans perpetuate stereotypes? How can we reclaim stereotypes on film and in other media to ensure they are interpreted by today’s cultural context and not repeated? What are the long-range effects on audiences—both white and black—especially those that experienced these stereotypes when they were first presented and tolerated?

Gather groups back together and have each group present the main ideas from their response session. What similarities are there between groups? What differences? Stereotypes in media still exist today. Ask students if they have any examples. How can we build an awareness that allows us to identify and call out stereotypes as we continually consume media?

Resources

Read more about Camille A. Brown and her work at: www.camilleabrown.org

References


“What is cultural appropriation and why does it cause offense?” The Week http://www.theweek.co.uk/cultural-appropriation 22 May 2017


Teach BC teaching resources teachbcd.bctf.ca

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_dance
Image Credits

Angelique Kidjo: HankBate 123 October 15, 2017. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike 4.0 International


Poster image: Sheet music from the Sam DeVincent Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music Archives Center, National Museum of American History AC#300 americanhistory.si.edu/blog/who-takes-cake-history-cakewalk

All other images: Courtesy of Camille A. Brown and Dancers www.camilleabrown.org/

*ink is the third installment in a trio of dances Camille A. Brown has developed around themes of racial identity