School Matinee Series • Study Guide

National Theatre

Barber Shop Chronicles

Fri • January 18 • 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 for Branda Turner, Events Manager at the Hop, for her help with this guide.

Enjoy the Show!

Hopkins Center Outreach Department:
Stephanie Pacheco, Outreach Manager
Mary Gaetz, Outreach Coordinator

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.

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Barber Shop Chronicles whizzes back and forth between a barber shop in the London neighborhood of Peckham to shops across the African continent, finding connections between people and places, past and present. The main characters in Barber Shop Chronicles are Emmanuel, the Nigerian owner of a south London barbershop, and Samuel, the son of Emmanuel’s oldest friend, who is also a barber. Their story is woven in with those of other characters in other barber shops: a man who feels let down by Nelson Mandela, and has let down the son he left behind in London; a young actor preparing for an audition, worried he doesn’t know how to play the role of a strong, black man; a man urgently in need of a haircut for a job interview. No matter where they are, customers and barbers share confessions, wisdom, advice and a love of soccer. Each scene reveals new connections, bringing to life African community and culture.

The show stars Patrice Naiambana, Peter Bankole, Abdul Salis, Sule Rimi, Kwami Odoom, Maynard Eziashi, David Webber, Cyril Nri, Dad Ajao, Bayo Gbadamosi, Martins Imhangbe and Tuwaine Barrett.

YouTube Break

Watch Barber Shop Chronicles actor Cyril Nri get his hair cut and talk about what the barbershop means to him:

youtu.be/JHQ0r7SjkYE

Watch the rest of the cast talk about the show:

www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/shows/barber-shop-chronicles
About the Artists

**NATIONAL THEATRE**

Staging over 20 productions a year at their home on the South Bank of the Thames River in London, National Theatre (NT) produces a variety of work that appeals to a wide audience: new plays, musicals, re-imagined classics and work for young people. They tour extensively in the United Kingdom and internationally, frequently working in collaboration with partner theaters. NT shows often transfer to the West End and to Broadway in the U.S., and the popular National Theatre Live program broadcasts the best of British theater to over 2000 venues in 60 countries around the world.

**FUEL THEATRE**

Fuel produces adventurous, playful and significant work—live, digital and across art forms— for a large audience in the U.K. and beyond. The group collaborates with outstanding artists who seek to make work that explores one’s place in the world: exposing fears and hopes for the future by creating experiences which empower people to make change in the world around them.

About the Creative Team

**Inua Ellams, playwright**

Born in Nigeria in 1984, Inua is an internationally touring poet, playwright, performer, graphic artist and designer. He has published four books of poetry, the latest is *Candy Coated Unicorns and Converse All-Stars*. His first play, *The 14th Tale*, won a Fringe First award at the Edinburgh International Theatre Festival. *Barber Shop Chronicles* is his fourth play; it played a sold-out run at the National Theatre. Inua is currently touring his one-man show, *An Evening with an Immigrant*. It reflects on his journey from a 12-year-old fleeing Nigeria to the present where, despite 20+ years in the U.K., he has only discretionary leave to remain in the country. See Inua Ellams give a TedX talk about the real-life inspirations for *Barber Shop Chronicles* and societal expectations of boys and men: www.youtube.com/watch?v=QG7Fb7E5nOk

**Bijan Sheibani, director**

An Associate Director of the National Theatre from 2010 to 2015, Bijan’s work in theater includes *Our Class*, *A Taste of Honey* and *Romeo and Juliet* for the National as well as many other productions at prestigious British venues such as the Donmar Warehouse, Royal Court Theatre and the Royal Opera House. His films *Groove is in the Heart* and *Samira’s Party* were both selected for the BFI London Film Festival.

Why This? Why Now?

Why write a story about black peoples’ hair for the stage? Playwright Ellams says:

“People have become accustomed to seeing people of color brutalized, and the counter to that is to show people of color beautifying themselves, spending lots of time on their physical selves. *Barber Shop Chronicles* plays into the dynamic where people just want to see joy and magic.”
Contextual Background

Where in the World is Barber Shop Chronicles?

The action of Barber Shop Chronicles jumps back and forth from Peckham in London, England to five cities in Africa—Johannesburg, Harare, Kampala, Lagos and Accra. These African cities are connected to London in part because they are located in former colonies of Great Britain; the African countries represented—South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nigeria and Ghana—were at one time part of the British Empire.

1. Peckham—The area known as Peckham is a large district in southeastern London that has many diverse communities, including the largest British Nigerian community in the city.

2. Johannesburg, South Africa—The largest city in South Africa, Johannesburg was officially established following the discovery of gold in the area in the late 19th century. Diamonds are also mined in the region. From 1948 through the 1990s, South Africa enforced the policy of apartheid (a-PAR-tied), which required segregation of races.

3. Harare, Zimbabwe—The city was founded in 1890 by a small military force and originally named after British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury. In 1982, it was renamed Harare on the second anniversary of Zimbabwean independence.

4. Kampala, Uganda—Kampala is the capital and largest city in Uganda. It has a tropical rainforest climate and diverse ethnic population.

5. Lagos, Nigeria—Lagos is one of the most populous cities on the entire continent of Africa. “Lagos” means “lakes” in Portuguese.

6. Accra, Ghana—Capital of Ghana, Accra is located right on the Atlantic Ocean. The city has a tropical savanna climate.
African Diaspora in London

The phrase African diaspora (die-AS-poor-uh) was coined during the 1990s. The term refers to people of African origin living outside the continent of Africa. Following the end of the Second World War, the British Nationality Act of 1948 allowed the 800,000,000 subjects in the British Empire to live and work in the United Kingdom without needing a visa. This migration was initially encouraged to help fill gaps in the U.K. labor market for both skilled and unskilled jobs, but over the years more laws were enacted to tighten restrictions on people from the colonies taking up residence and gaining citizenship in the U.K. Today, those seeking to emigrate do so as students, refugees, asylum seekers, multinational company employees, care and medical workers and visitors who overstay their travel visas. With a multitude of opportunities both economic and educational, the city of London attracts an increasingly diverse population of Africans. In a 2011 census of the United Kingdom, 13% of the population (992,000 people) identified as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British. The London Datastore recorded 767,000 citizens in London reporting to be from Nigeria, Somalia, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa; other African countries, including Chad, Gabon and Lesotho, are represented in smaller numbers.

African Hair

For centuries, hair has been an important, expressive part of African life, serving as a way to indicate marital status, age, religion, ethnic identity, and wealth, as well as geographic origin. In the past, the Kuramo people of Nigeria were recognized by their shaved heads, with a single tuft of hair left on top. In the Wolof culture of Senegal, girls partially shaved their heads to indicate they were not of marrying age. In other cultures, men would wind their hair into elaborate braided cones. Widows stopped grooming their hair as part of mourning their dead spouse. All ethnicities took great care with their hair, as it represented not only social status but spiritual power. This power came from hair being the part of the body closest to heaven and consequently where one’s spirit resided. African cultures today often wear traditional hair styles like the Didi and the Beri Beri, sometimes updated with modern touches like bright colors. They are worn for cultural celebrations and special events such as weddings. In the 1960s, Nigerian photographer J.D. ‘Okhai Ojeikere began documenting Nigerian hair and headdresses for both their beauty and ethnographic value. This close correlation between hair and culture is one reason why it was devastating when 16th century slave traders insisted on shaving the heads of Africans being shipped off to the Western slave markets.

History of Barber Shop Culture in America

The role of barber has been filled by black men ever since their arrival in America as part of the North American slave trade. Barbering one another in preparation for church on Sundays (when and where they were allowed to attend) was one small way men could exercise control over their bodies. Sometimes slaves were tasked with preparing other slaves for auction by barbering them—the nicer looking a slave was, the better price they might bring. Black male slaves also shaved the faces and cut the hair of their white owners. Known as valets, or body men, these slaves could be hired out by their owners to barber shops to produce additional income. In some cases, barbers were able to negotiate to keep a portion of their wages, and some had apprentices working under them to learn the trade. In both the pre- and post-Civil War South, the barbering industry had a high demand for workers and many black male barbers established themselves in the trade, setting up storefronts or barbering on steamships.
As Jim Crow laws and other segregationist actions took hold after the Civil War, black barbers would more and more often deny service to black customers because many white men would not be shaved with the same razor that had touched a black man, or they objected to the perceived social equality of both races being served by the same barber. Known as “color-line” barbers, they received criticism for excluding black customers, or for shaving and trimming them after hours, out of public view. This put barbers in a tenuous position: Did they work to make a living in the circumstances handed to them, or did they advocate for change and acceptance into society?

As European immigrants surged into the U.S. in the early 20th century, many took up the job of barbering, taking white business away from black barbers. Some states passed laws and regulations that prohibited black barbershops from serving white customers. As white society pushed for segregation in the early to mid-20th century, barbershops that had relied on white customers began to openly serve black men, and the role of barber shop as a social forum for black men solidified. Barbershop owners were and still are held in high regard by their clientele, not unlike the preacher of a congregation. As fathers introduce sons to their shop, the relationship between client and barber carries on through generations. Other public institutions have come to recognize the powerful social foundation of black barbershops as well. In Texas in 2011, a cohort of barber shops offered free blood-pressure checks to patrons as part of a study on high blood pressure in African American males—the results were so positive that the study recommended partnering further with barbershops to improve health outcomes in communities. The evolution of barbershops from slavery to social space has allowed the flourishing of black identity and public discourse for black men of all ages and social classes.

**Being Seen**

“Men enter the barbershop for untold reasons, and sometimes a haircut is the least of them. We aren’t expected to be beautiful. It isn’t a label typically ascribed to the physical markers of male identity. Despite measures of progress in the media, which conditions much of how people are perceived—I’m thinking of films like Moonlight and texts such as Jesmyn Ward’s Men We Reaped and Danez Smith’s [Insert] Boy—beauty, for all the dimension it possesses, is not how society, on the whole, understands manhood. For black men, this can be especially true.

So you begin to wonder if the world had seen Philando Castile or Terence Crutcher or Jordan Edwards as beautiful, perhaps they might be with us today. We are desperate to be rendered visible. We want to be acknowledged by others, assured and held tight. In the heritage of American horrors, black men and boys have paid a particular price for this desire to be seen—and all for what? To be granted some semblance of selfhood, of humanity. It is rarely spoken, but I think men enter the barbershop seeking a form of beauty, be it in their physical appearance or their inner self. Maybe it’s clarity with regard to a personal issue, or the ease of fellowship the space provides. Maybe after a burdensome week, you are in need of release among your tribe. These are intimacies camouflaged in a simple request: Look at me.”


**Local Connections**

Listen to hear more about black barbering in the Upper Valley:

nhpr.org/post/limited-options-black-hair-care-upper-valley-one-barber-draws-crowd#stream/0

Hear one woman’s quest to find a black beauty shop in New Hampshire:

nhpr.org/post/you-asked-we-answered-where-can-black-woman-get-her-hair-done-new-hampshire#stream/0
Pre-performance discussion questions

• How is your hair important to you, or not? To what degree do you feel your identity is connected with hair and how it looks? Have you ever changed your haircut, style or color? Why did you make that choice?

• How does outer appearance impact inner self?

• Have you ever been to a barber shop or salon? If so, what was your experience like? How do you think your experience of getting your hair cut may be different from what will be portrayed onstage?

• There is a dearth of barbers in Vermont and New Hampshire who embrace the cutting of black hair. Why is black hair considered “challenging” to style and cut? How would it feel to be told you couldn’t get your hair cut when and where you wanted? Or if a barber or stylist incorrectly cut or styled your hair?

Post-performance discussion questions


• What were the most compelling characters or themes in the play and why did you find them interesting?

• Do you think that the pace and rhythm of the storytelling were effective? Explain why or why not.

• If you were asked to describe Barber Shop Chronicles to a friend who didn’t see the play using only one sentence, what would that sentence be?

• Which characters were you most drawn to in Barber Shop Chronicles and why? How were the qualities of character revealed by their action and speech? Was there a character whose personality or ideas you most related to?

Learning Activities

To See and Be Seen (grades 9–10):


After reading, ask students to sit in a circle. Have each student name something that makes them beautiful. Discuss why talking about their own beauty can be uncomfortable at times. Why are physical traits important in human society? How can they impede? What are the challenges to having a positive body image for either men and women? In what ways does society make decisions based on appearance? What specific thoughts might a black man have about his appearance? Ask students to create a self-portrait that reflects the positive aspects of their beauty and self. If time allows, ask students to create a short piece of prose or poetry to accompany their portrait. Hang portraits so all students can view them. What do you see in others’ portraits that you also see in yourself? Discuss the broader perception of beauty in society. What are messages from American society about looking “black” compared with looking “white”? In what ways are black communities portrayed in art and across media? How might people of color be managing their appearance to draw or not draw attention to themselves?
**You Have to Live in Somebody Else’s Country to Understand** (grades 9–12):

For this activity, you will need to enlist the services of a bilingual adult or student to translate and read the poem below aloud in a language other than English.

Prepare the class by telling them that a guest speaker has volunteered to read them the poem “You Have to Live in Somebody Else’s Country to Understand,” written in 1984 by Noy Chou, a ninth-grade student from a high school in suburban Boston who was born in Cambodia. Introduce the reader. Request that students close their eyes as they listen to the poem and remind them to listen without talking. Invite the guest to read their translation.

After the poem is read, have the guest give students the following instructions in the language they used for reading the poem: “Please take out a piece of paper and complete this journal assignment in five minutes. Describe a time when you felt like an outsider, or felt that someone judged you without knowing you and/or being aware of your circumstances.” Ask the guest to repeat the instructions in English, indicating that this is for the benefit of those who are non-native speakers of the guest’s language.

Before they journal as requested, ask students to describe their reactions during the reading of the poem. Write down and organize student responses as they speak. How did they feel when they did not understand the language? What did they want to do when the reader began to recite in a language with which they were unfamiliar? Were they able to pick up on any aspect of the poem—cadence, emotion—despite not knowing the language? How might the teacher and the reader have helped you to understand the poem since you did not understand the language? For those who might have understood the language, how did the poem make them feel? What were their thoughts about classmates who could not understand the poem? How might they have helped those that didn’t understand? What are the ways we can seek understanding from others when we may not understand their language or culture?

Have students review their responses. Ask them to consider more broadly how the feelings they experienced relate to those of new immigrants. Based on this activity, what are some of the issues immigrants face when they arrive somewhere new? In what ways would they feel like outsiders? How might they cope with those feelings? What groups and individuals are treated like outsiders in America? What are the possible results or consequences when people feel like outsiders in their surroundings?

Hand out copies of the poem in English. Have the guest read it aloud in English, or do so yourself, while students follow along. Have students analyze and discuss the poem, selecting phrases, lines or passages that strike them. Ask students to write a corresponding personal experience that reflects the essence of the selected sections. Invite students to share their thoughts and reflect on what they learned from this experience. What do they take away from this poem that may help them to better understand the feelings of others in the future? How might we act differently toward people when we recognize that they might be feeling like an outsider?

**“You Have to Live in Somebody Else’s Country to Understand”**

by Noy Chou

Published in 1986 by the Anti-Defamation League for the “A World of Difference” project.

What is it like to be an outsider?
What is it like to sit in the class where everyone has blond hair and you have black hair?
What is it like when the teacher says, “Whoever wasn’t born here raise your hand.”
And you are the only one.
Then, when you raise your hand, everybody looks at you and makes fun of you.
You have to live in somebody else’s country to understand.
What is it like when the teacher treats you like you’ve been here all your life?
What is it like when the teacher speaks too fast and you are the only one who can’t understand what he or she is saying, and you try to tell him or her to slow down.
Then when you do, everybody says, “If you don’t understand, go to a lower class or get lost.”
You have to live in somebody else’s country to understand.
What is it like when you are an opposite?
When you wear the clothes of your country and they think you are crazy to wear these clothes and you think they are pretty.
You have to live in somebody else’s country to understand.
What is it like when you are always a loser.
What is it like when somebody bothers you when you do nothing to them?
You tell them to stop but they tell you that they didn’t do anything to you.
Then, when they keep doing it until you can’t stand it any longer, you go up to the teacher and tell him or her to tell them to stop bothering you.
They say that they didn’t do anything to bother you.
Then the teacher asks the person sitting next to you.
He says, “Yes, she didn’t do anything to her” and you have no witness to turn to.
So the teacher thinks you are a liar.
You have to live in somebody else’s country to understand.
What is it like when you try to talk and you don’t pronounce the words right?
They don’t understand you.
They laugh at you but you don’t know that they are laughing at you, and you start to laugh with them.
They say, “Are you crazy, laughing at yourself? Go get lost, girl.”
You have to live in somebody else’s country without a language to understand.
What is it like when you walk in the street and everybody turns around to look at you and you don’t know that they are looking at you.
Then, when you find out, you want to hide your face but you don’t know where to hide because they are everywhere.
You have to live in somebody else’s country to feel it.

Adapted from Independent Television Services as part of “The New Americans” series.

Family Portraits (grades 10–12):

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Have the group of students divide in half and stand in lines facing one another. One student then stands between the lines. She or he is free to share any facts about herself. It can be very basic (I am the oldest, I have two brothers, I like to ski, we have a cat, I’m allergic to chocolate, etc.) or more intimate (I am a leader in my family, I don’t get along with my sister, I have a difficult time trusting people, I can’t fall asleep easily at night, I dream of being a parent, etc.). The students standing across from each other are to cross to the other side every time they have something in common with what the speaker shares.

Have students sit in a circle and ask what they learned about one another. Did anyone learn anything new about themselves or one another? What is unique about you? Was there something that most of you had in common? What do you think makes people unique?

**EXTENSION:**

Ask all students to strike an interesting pose on the count of three. Pick the student with the most negative space and ask her to hold that pose while the other students may relax. Negative space refers to the openings left by the shape of her body; the focus is not on the shape of the body but rather on the space NOT occupied by the body—the space between a raised arm and the head, the space between a raised leg and the ground, etc. Ask a student to use their body to create a shape that fills or otherwise relates to the open spaces around the student holding the pose. Have the students watching identify the new spaces created around the two students.

Divide the class into groups. One person in the group strikes a pose and the others work on identifying and filling the spaces created around each other. After students have explored together, provide students with a specific word, or title, to inform their shapes. Examples are “The Happy Family,” “Tree,” “Death,” “Baseball,” “Bully,” “Open,” “Closed,” “Gossip,” “Trust,” “Distrust,” etc. Once the group has their word or phrase, ask them to work out a shape that represents or relates to it. Ask them to practice so they can easily recreate their shape to show the rest of the group. To share work, ask each group to form their shape, hold for a count of ten, then break. The other students should be arranged as audience to observe.

Discuss the pictures you see. How does the spacing, gesture, direction, body language, etc. help you understand what you’re seeing? How did the group work together to find solutions? What does trust look like? What does distrust look like? As a participant, did you feel as if you were taking a risk in this activity? Is it helpful to explore ideas in this way? Why or why not? How is working out a problem using your body different from using paper or a computer? Did you learn anything about your partners from doing this activity together?
Vocabulary

**Apartheid**: system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination that existed in South Africa from 1948 until the 1990s. Apartheid encouraged state repression of Black Africans, Asian South Africans and other people of color for the benefit of the nation’s minority white population.

**Asylum**: the protection granted by a nation to those who have left their native country as a political refugee

**Cohort**: a group of people banded together or treated as a group

**Discretionary**: decided by officials and not fixed by rules

**Jim Crow**: referring to laws of racial segregation directed at African Americans; “Jim Crow” was a pejorative expression referring to a minstrel song called “Jump Jim Crow” that was performed in blackface

**Visa**: an endorsement on a passport indicating that the holder can enter, leave, or stay for a specified period of time in a country

Resources

National Theatre web site for *Barber Shop Chronicles*: www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/shows/barber-shop-chronicles

Inua Ellams website: www.inuaellams.com/#about

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PBS Independent Lens: www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/foeducators_lesson_plan_01.html


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