

# DREAMGIRLS

Music by **Henry Krieger** | Book and Lyrics by **Tom Eyen**  
 Orchestrations by **Harold Wheeler** | Directed by **Mark Clements**  
 September 22-November 1, 2014 | The Quadracci Powerhouse

This Teacher's Guide is designed to be used in the classroom along with The Rep's Play Guide for *Dreamgirls*. These are some suggested activities for your classroom. The Play Guide is available online at <http://www.milwaukeeREP.com/On-Stage/2015-16-Season/Dreamgirls-PlayGuide/>

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

### CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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### SUGGESTED TEACHING TOPICS

- 1.) Gender Roles
- 2.) Musical Impact
- 3.) Dreams

### GENDER ROLES (Now and Then)

#### DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- **EXPECTATIONS:** How were men and women expected to behave in the 1960s and 70s? Are expectations different for men and women? How are men and women expected to act today? How do expectations impact behavior? Have others' expectations of you ever affected your actions?
- **BIAS:** Have you personally experienced a situation in which you or someone you know was treated differently based on their gender? What are some examples of how men and women are presented in the media today?

#### DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- **VIEWPOINTS:** What thematic elements or plot points in *Dreamgirls* are told from a gender-specific perspective, and what elements are universal? How would the story change if the genders of the characters were reversed?
- **EXPECTATIONS:** In the first scene, Curtis Taylor, Jr., tells Effie, "You need someone to look after you, make the right decisions. A girl like you could get hurt without someone to protect you." What assumptions is Curtis making about Effie's abilities to act independently? How would this conversation play out today? How does Effie defy expectations throughout the show?

### MUSICAL IMPACT

#### DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- **MUSIC:** Why do humans make music? Think about your own school. Do you have music education? Why might music education be an essential curricular component?
- **ENVIRONMENT:** Think about the music you prefer, the music your friends prefer, the music someone in your family prefers, or music preferences of people in other social circles. Are they all the same genre of music? How does our environment impact our choice of music? Do you think a certain genre of music pervades the major focus of modern media?

#### DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- **"SOUL":** The story of The Dreams comes to life through their music. How did the lives of the characters in *Dreamgirls* impact the songs they were singing? What is the "soul" Jimmy Early is referring to in his music? How did the music help to communicate their thoughts and feelings? What is it about music that helps communicate personal and universal stories?
- **DISCRIMINATION:** The story of *Dreamgirls* serves as a historical allegory for the gains and failures of Civil Rights values, addressing the issues of discrimination and equal opportunity for black Americans in the entertainment industry. Do you think the entertainment industry today provides equal opportunity for all minority groups? Is each group equally represented in the mainstream music industry?

Reference the *Dreamgirls* Play Guide pg 8 for further information on girl groups of the 1960s.

#### MOVE! :

Listen to and read the lyrics of "Steppin' to the Bad Side" and "Cadillac Aria" from *Dreamgirls*. Students should then choose one or two songs on the top charts today that examine the story of social context told through the lyrics. How is the song explicitly political? If not political, how does it reflect or comment on society? **DISCUSS** as a class the role music serves today in bridging or creating cultural differences. Considering this, students can **WRITE** a spoken word style poem or a song communicating a message they would like to share with society or someone close to them. Students should **PERFORM** these pieces in groups or to the full class. Encourage incorporating music, creative movement and collaborating with other members of the class to take their performance to the next level. (Remember the "soul" Jimmy Early speaks about!)

#### EVOLUTION OF MUSIC:

PLAY one of the "Evolution of Dance" YouTube videos for the class (or the recent Jimmy Fallon & Justin Timberlake "History of Rap" / Will Smith and Jimmy Fallon "Evolution of Hip Hop Dance.") Students may break into pairs or groups to put together an "Evolution of Girl Groups" music piece beginning with the groups of the 1960s. Encourage creativity and choreography for their performances! Students may choose to **SING** the songs with karaoke style background music or **LIP SYNC**. Students may choose to hop on the "Lip Sync Battle" train and turn their performances into a dance/sing/lip-sync off!



Leonard E. Sullivan, Bradley Gibson, and Jonathan Butler-Duplessis.  
 Photo by Michael Brosilow.

# DREAMS

## DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- OPPORTUNITIES:** Consider a dream you have for your future. What talents, skills, or opportunities do you have that might help you achieve this dream? Are there obstacles that stand in the way of achieving this dream? If so, what tactics might you use to overcome these obstacles?
- ADVERSITY:** Where do you want to be five years from now? Imagine all of your dreams come true. How will the rest of your life be affected? What may happen as a result of your dreams coming true? Think about a time in your life when things did not go as you planned. How did you handle the situation? How did you change as a person after facing adversity (a difficult situation or condition; misfortune or tragedy)?

## I AM CHANGING:

In groups of 3 or 4, students choose a principal character and **CHART** the development of the character throughout the show. Consider adjectives to describe character traits, lyrics, conflict and overall transformation/obstacles. Utilizing this chart, the group should **CREATE** a beginning, middle, and end **TABLEAU** representing the character's journey. Strongly consider levels (standing, sitting, kneeling), bold physicality choices, and commitment to their choices, especially in relationships between the characters. Which characters have more power at the beginning of the show? How can this be shown without words?

## POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- 1.) Motown Records
- 2.) Civil Rights Movement
- 3.) Women's Movement

## DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- CHANGING:** Do the dreams of the characters change as their stories unfold? How did Effie's life change when Deena became the lead singer? Effie initially reacted in a way that turned those close to her against her, but by the end of the show she sings "I am changing/trying ev'ry way I can/I am changing/I'll be better than I am." Compare and contrast Effie's actions when she leaves The Dreams to her actions at the end of the play.
- DEVELOPMENT:** Throughout the play, characters are changing their identities or previous views of themselves in order to climb up the ladder of "show biz." Describe how the outside world of the show biz affects their art, careers and lives. How do the men and women evolve over the course of the show in the decisions they allow others to make for them and the decisions they begin to make for themselves?



Nova Y. Payton as Effie. Photo by Michael Brosilow.



Dan'yelle Williamson, Trisha Jeffrey and Nova Y. Payton as Effie. Photo by Michael Brosilow.

## STANDARDS

### Common Core State Standards:

#### English Language Arts

**RL.8-12.3 NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

**RL.9-10.1 LITERACY COMPREHENSION**

**RL 8-12.3 ANALYZE DIALOGUE**

**W.8-12.7 RESEARCH**

**SL.8-12.1 COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSIONS**

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