

Black Acting Methods Lesson Plan: Storytelling through Hip-Hop

Teacher: Hannah Zdroik

Date: 11-5-2023

Subject: Theatre (T)

Grade Level: 9-12 (H)

Common Core Theatre Standards (Based on the Wisconsin Academic Standards for Theatre):

TP.Cn.16.h: Cross Disciplinary

Evaluate the historical and cultural relationships between theatre and other disciplines and how it can impact society.

TD.Cr.16.h: Collaboration

Collaborate as a creative team with specified roles to make artistic, interpretive choices in a devised or scripted work.

Common Core Content Standards (Based on the Wisconsin Academic Standards for Theatre):

Content Area: Theatre Performance (P)

Standard 4 - CONNECT: Students will relate prior knowledge and personal experience with theatre to cultural and historical contexts.

Content Area: Theatre Production (D)

Standard 1 - CREATE: Students will generate, develop, and refine artistic work.

Overview: Inspired by Sharell D. Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer's *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* and the Hip Hop Theatre Initiative, students will explore expression and storytelling through collaborative activities and musical approaches. Students will participate in "Stomp, Clap, & Sing" as a means to understand the importance of a cipher and gathering community. Students will research a Black "influencer" who has left (or is leaving) a positive impact in the field of performing arts and/or another field and beyond. Students will collaborate in groups to create a musical beat using themes and ideas from their positive influencers.

Materials Needed:

Teacher: Laptop, Projector/Smartboard, access to the internet, *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* book by Sharrell D. Luckett with Tia M. Shaffer, [Google Slides](#), school tablets/iPads or school computers for students if needed, musical instruments, posterboard, markers.

Students: Laptop, access to the internet, access to [Google Slides](#), access to free software: Garage Band, Audacity, Chrome Music Lab, etc. through laptop, tablet, iPad, etc., journal, pencil, posterboard, markers.

Space: Large classroom space for the "Stomp, Clap & Sing" activity (circle singing and movement), classroom space for working, potential computer lab space, outdoors (if possible for music activity), depending on the accessibility of software to students (Garage Band, Audacity, Chrome Music Lab, etc.)

Student Friendly Lesson Objective (Purpose) I can...	Teacher Activities (Teacher Strategies)	Student Activities/Differentiated Instruction	Assignments
<p>I can explore empathy by learning about an influencer in Black history who impacted the field of performing arts.</p> <p>I can use music, specifically hip-hop, as a way of expression and storytelling.</p> <p>I can create a loving and understanding atmosphere by sharing and listening to individual stories.</p>	<p><u>Anticipatory Set:</u> As students walk in the classroom, a rap song will be played to get their attention (in this example, it is “Jesus Walks” by Kanye West).</p> <p>The instructor will read from pg. 89 from <i>Black Acting Methods</i> and read from the top of the page until the second paragraph (“...within the production.”).</p> <p>Before the “Musical Storytelling” section, the instructor will read from pg. 143 from <i>Black Acting Methods</i>, from the first section of the “First Breakbeak” section to “...spiritual energy.”</p> <p><u>Essential Questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happens when theatre artists explore and actively listen to each other’s stories? • What happens when theatre artists use hip hop as a form of expression and storytelling? 	<p><u>Guided Practice / Strategies:</u> For the “Positive Influencer” section, the instructor will provide directions (slide 5 & 6) and provide an example of a positive influencer (slide 7-In this case, Louis Armstrong). The instructor will ask the following questions to the class to aid in brainstorming and to provide an example for the students’ presentations. The following questions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some influential things that Louis did? • How has he impacted the world of jazz? • What other information can we add? <p>The students may use pgs. 37-38 and pgs. 91-94 in <i>Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches</i> for suggestions.</p> <p>For the “Musical Storytelling” section, the instructor will provide directions to the students (slides 14, 15, & 16). The instructor will provide an example (still using Louis Armstrong in this scenario) and go to a free recording software (Incredibox in this case) and will ask the students to assist</p>	<p><u>Bell Ringer:</u> Students will participate in the physical activity, “Stomp, Clap, & Sing” based off of the <i>Black Acting Methods</i> pg. 62 activity. Instructors should refer to this page to review directions for this activity or see attached page below. Examples of songs that can be used would be: “Do-Re-Mi”, “When the Saints Go Marching In”/”Swing Low Sweet Chariot”, “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”, etc.</p> <p>The instructor will lead a verbal discussion with the class, who will still be in circle formation. Questions will be (<i>based on Black Acting Methods, pg. 151</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on Stomp, Clap, & Sing. What can we take away from this activity? • What would your intentions, words, and actions look like if you accepted that you were the carrier of your culture? • How would you interact differently with your

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happens when theatre artists, with empathy, use theatre as a means to change racial injustice? <p><u>Input:</u> <u>Re-memory:</u> The process of reflecting on memories; the act of going back in time before life hurt and exploring first memory: touch, love, loss, light, etc.</p> <p><u>Cipher:</u> A circular gathering of artists making music, dancing, and gathering. Stems from African rituals and culture.</p> <p>“Ritualizing space where rhythms, dance, songs, storytelling, humor, and masking are used to reflect the ambitions and intelligence of people who have created their own theatre history.” (Banks, pg. 144).</p> <p><u>Griot/Djeli:</u> A term for the keeper of culture, the storyteller who serves as the embodied memory of that culture and idea.</p> <p><u>Hip-Hop:</u> A genre of music born in the</p>	with creating a musical beat and provide rationales for each layer/sound. <p><u>Independent Practice / Activities:</u> For the “Positive Influencer” section, each student will pick a Black artist who has positively impacted the field of performing arts, or another field. The artist could be from years ago, or even modern day. For suggestions, the students may reference pgs. 37-38 and pgs. 91-94 in <i>Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches</i>. Students will create a presentation about their influencer, including why and how they have impacted the field of performing arts/other area.</p> <p>The students will need to include the name of the influencer, an introduction/overview, the time period and location, at least two examples of their influencer’s work/projects, at least three things as to how the influencer changed the field of performing arts/other field, and what the student learned and why the influencer is important.</p> <p><i>Note: Influencer is not referring to social media influencers, or</i></p>	community? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What power would your speech hold? <p><i>Inspired from pg. 151, Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches.</i></p> <p>During the “Musical Storytelling” section, the instructor will lead the students in an activity, taken from pg. 157 of <i>Black Acting Methods</i>, and read aloud the instructions from “Sounds of the Neighborhood.” Students will participate in the activity simultaneously as the instructor provides directions. This portion may be done outside or in a different environment than the classroom.</p> <p>After the activity, the instructor will lead a class-wide verbal discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the most present in your life? • What keeps you up at night? • What do you think about when you get up in the morning? • What are some ways that you and your “influencer” are the
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	<p>1970s but made popular in the 1980s and 1990s that is associated with cultural movement. Hip-hop also stems from African rituals, culture, and storytelling.</p> <p><u>DJ</u>: Also known as “Disc Jockey.” A person who plays and mixes recorded music for an audience.</p> <p><u>Beatboxing</u>: Vocal percussion that imitates drums or sounds, created by the human mouth.</p> <p><u>Stanislavski Method</u>: A method of acting using a variety of techniques in order to portray a believable character through empathy and similar experiences.</p> <p><u>Model</u>: For the “Positive Influencer” section, the instructor will provide directions (slide 5 & 6) and provide an example of a positive influencer (slide 7-In this case, Louis Armstrong) with some pre-filled answers before asking for contribution from the students (see guided practice).</p> <p>For the “Musical Storytelling” section, the</p>	<p><i>the modern term.</i></p> <p>For the “Musical Storytelling” section, students in groups will create a 1-1.5-minute musical beat based on the ideas and themes of each student’s influencers. Each student should focus on a theme from their influencer to collectively create a musical beat/hip-hop/rap with their classmates. Ideas could stem from lines from a play, lyrics from a song, segments of a speech, poems, passages wrote by the student, inspired by their influencer, etc.</p> <p>Using GarageBand, Audacity, Chrome Music Lab, Incredibox, Groove Pizza, or another free music mixing software, students will create their own beat in groups.</p> <p>Students are welcome to record sounds from anywhere; their neighborhood, after school activities, their own voice, musical instruments, or even play their beat live.</p> <p>The beat project must include five different sounds, the themes of each group member’s influencer, at least one “vocal” portion with lyrics, rationale for each sound the students include, and be at</p>	<p>same? How are you different?</p> <p>Inspired from pg. 160, <i>Black Acting Methods</i>.</p> <p><u>Remediation</u>: For students who need assistance picking a positive influencer, a suggestion list will be provided.</p> <p>Students not as familiar with music composition may be paired/grouped with other students who are familiar with music.</p> <p>Students with hearing loss may use alternative methods of musical composition, including vibrations, tactile exploration, or another form of expression.</p> <p>Students with physical disabilities may sit while doing physical activities.</p> <p><u>Enrichment</u>: For the enrichment activity, students will participate in a “Tell Me Yours, I’ll Tell You Mine” activity, based on page 62 of <i>Black Acting Methods</i>. The instructor will use this section as a guide</p>
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	<p>instructor will provide directions to the students (slides 14, 15, & 16). The instructor will provide an example song (still using Louis Armstrong in this scenario) and go to a free recording software (Incredibox in this case). The instructor will ask the students for guidance, creating a beat that reflects themes of the positive influencer and rationale for each sound (see guided practice).</p> <p><u>Check for Understanding:</u> After verbally explaining each section, “Positive Influencer” and “Musical Storytelling” the instructor will ask the class as a whole if there are any questions in order to clarify confusion and concerns that others may benefit from hearing. The instructor will be available during worktime for individual/group questions. If needed, the instructor can work one-on-one with students who need extra assistance.</p> <p><u>Closure:</u> After student presentations, the instructor will lead the</p>	<p>least 1-1.5 minutes. Students will present their beats to the class. Students can present their rationale and themes via display (PowerPoint, a poster, for example) or another acceptable medium.</p> <p>The students will present information about their influencers to the class.</p> <p>The student groups will present their musical beats to the class, as well as their rationales and themes.</p> <p><i>NOTE: This lesson could be modified where all the students in the class would recreate the musical beats of their classmates, using only instruments and beatboxing.</i></p>	<p>for directions to the group. The students will then perform each other’s stories to the whole class.</p> <p><u>Daily Writing Assignment:</u> The daily writing assignment will be accomplished through the “Positive Influencer” presentation, the free writing closing discussion at the end of the lesson, and the assigned homework.</p> <p><u>Assessment / Evaluation:</u> Students will be graded individually. The rubric/assessment is attached below this lesson plan in detail.</p> <p><u>Homework:</u> Students will fill out the “Hidden Talents Questionnaire” and be prepared to share with a partner or group (what they are comfortable with sharing) in a following class period. The “Hidden Talents Questionnaire” can be found attached below this document. Answers will vary, dependent on the student, which in itself is the purpose of the assignment.</p>
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	<p>students in a verbal discussion, reviewing the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What themes did you see today?• What theme did your group explore?• What can we take away from this lesson?• How does music enhance storytelling?• How can we apply this to theatre, culture, and inclusion? <p>Students will be invited to free write in their journals with any other thoughts from the lesson.</p> <p><u>Time Duration:</u> Two 90-minute class periods; especially to provide enough work time for the music creations and recordings.</p>		<p>Additionally, the students will be asked to read the excerpt “The Impact of Race of Casting Today” on page 94 of the <i>Black Acting Methods</i> book.</p>
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Hidden Talents Questionnaire: *(Inspired and adapted from pg. 61 of Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches).*

Please fill out this questionnaire. You can share as much and as little information as you are comfortable.

1. Name
2. Age
3. Hidden talents?
4. Do you write?
5. Would you like to write?
6. Home: Last address?
7. When were you last at home?
8. When did you leave home?
9. Why did you leave home?
10. Who did you leave at home?
11. Who did you leave home with?
12. Please describe a fantasy home.
13. What is a parent?
14. Who are your parents?
15. What is the last bit of advice you remember from a parent?
16. What is parenting?
17. Are you a parent?
18. If you could do anything, be anywhere, what would you do, where would you go? Name the place.
19. Love: What is love?
20. Who do you love?
21. Who loves you?
22. If love has a face, name it.
23. Describe the last time you saw love.
24. Death/Birth: How have you escaped death?
25. What is rebirth?
26. If you could turn back time, how would you change your life?

ASSESSMENT for Musical Storytelling Lesson:

Name: _____

The student participated in group activities and made an effort to understand the topics presented.
/10 points

The student participated in group discussions with thoughtful answers and/or questions.

/10 points

The student created an effortful presentation which included all of the components required:
/20 points

- The name of the influencer
- An introduction/overview
- The time period and location
- At least two examples of their influencer's work/projects
- At least three things as to how the influencer changed the field of performing arts/other field
- What the student learned and why the influencer is important

The student participated in group musical storytelling efforts and was an equal partner within work collaborations.

/15 points

The student (with group) created a musical beat that included all of the following:

/25 points

- Five different sounds
- The themes of each group member's influencer
- At least one "vocal" portion with lyrics
- Rationale for each sound the students include
- Be at least 1-1.5 minutes.

The student participated in presenting their musical beats to the class and provided an appropriate presentation for rationale and themes.

/20 points

=100 points

J. Emeka

Underwood. In 2012, the Royal Shakespeare Company toured a production of *Julius Caesar* set in Africa. "Color-blind," "non-traditional," or "experimental" practices that cast Black actors in White roles continue to gain interest and enthusiasm. As casting practices continue to evolve and mean different things for different productions, I believe it is important for actors and directors to develop clear and consistent approaches to the implications of race within a production.

The impact of race on casting today

Speaking in racial terms, I have identified three directing approaches that are often used when working with a Black actor in a role that was written for a White actor:

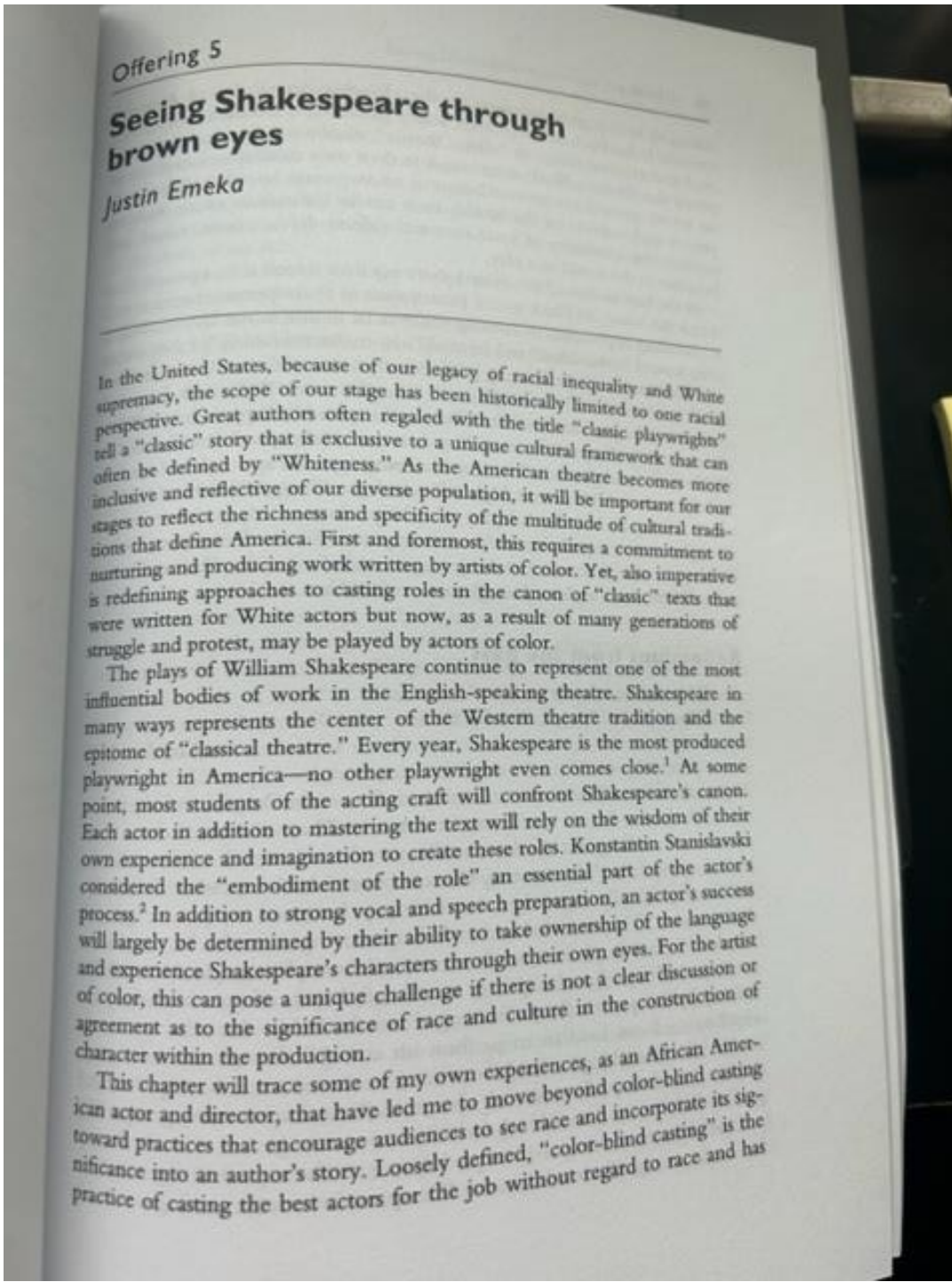
- 1 Attempt to create a race-less or color-blind reality onstage where racial distinctions bare no biological or cultural significance. An example would be casting a White family with an Asian mother, a Black father, and White child.
- 2 Maintain the character is still White even though the actor is not. All theatre is a game of pretend so onstage anything is possible—a woman can be cast to play a man; a man can be cast to play a child; a Black person can be cast to play a White person.
- 3 Change the race of the character. That is, invite the audience to recognize the character as a Black person within the world of the play and incorporate this dynamic into their understanding of the story.

In an ideal theatre, where all people participate equally, I believe there is room for all three approaches. However, I believe the first two approaches are more problematic than progressive. In my own experience, most times when White directors cast Black actors or other actors of color in White roles, they believe they are implementing the color-blind approach; when they are actually implementing the second approach—creating a White cultural experience using Black and Brown actors. I believe this type of directorial vision occurs largely as a result of an inability to discuss the implications of race and specificity of culture, as well as a dangerous assumption of what is "universal."

Topics concerning race continue to be some of the most contentious to have in our country. A legacy of racial in-

Teacher Resources:

Anticipatory Set: Page 89 (before "Positive Influencer" Section):



Hiphoppas are judged by the content of their character and skill, not by the color of their skin, their choice of religion, or social status. Since the early days of our cultural existence, our moral pillars have been peace, love, unity, and happiness.

(KRS-One¹⁴)

First breakbeat¹⁵

The three Afro-diasporic principles/practices from which HHTI draws its inspiration and practice—ritual, word, and time—are not discreet or divisible. They interrelate, playing off of and informing one another.

Word, sound, and movement fuel ritual.

Rituals invoke and embody the ancestors.

Word and ritual expand an understanding of time.

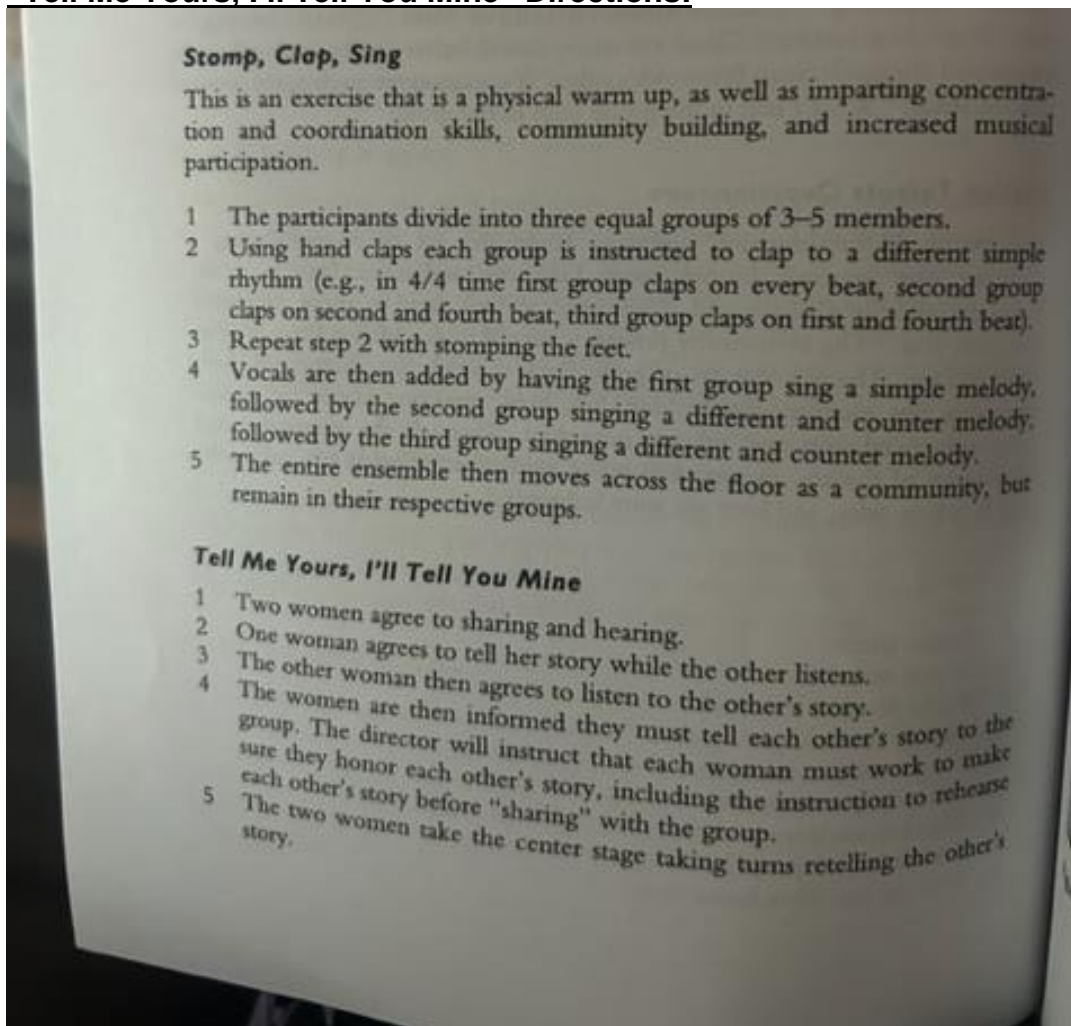
Time inhabits a reciprocal relationship with the word's spiritual power.

The ritual utterer of words conjures time; they know how to stop and start time through the histories they impart and also through the (re)creation of those histories.¹⁶ Not only does word have the potential to alter time, but time, throughout human history, alters the power and efficacy of words.

The emcee in Hip Hop culture carries the legacy of the *griot* or *ajéji*, the carrier of culture, who serves as the embodied memory of a culture. Playwright, theorist, and one of the central proponents of an Afrocentric model of understanding Black theatre Paul Carter Harrison writes, "Word-force, spoken or gesticulated, is essential for ritualistic illumination."¹⁷ The ritual leader sets in motion the *Nommo* force, "the creative force that gives form to all things."¹⁸ According to Harrison, it is "the power of the word, that *Nommo* force, which manipulates all forms of raw life and conjures images that not only represent his biological place in Time and Space, but his spiritual existence as well."¹⁹ Thus the actor, in the role of ritual leader in a ritually derived theatre practice, is the "activator" of spiritual energy.

Barbara Ann Teer, founder of the National Black Theatre in Harlem, similarly referred to the actors in her company as "liberators."²⁰ Looking at this progression in an African diasporic context, the actor of/in an African (Indigenous) influenced performance participates in the liberation of a people and

Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches, page 62, “Stomp, Clap, & Sing” Directions and “Tell Me Yours, I’ll Tell You Mine” Directions:



Teacher Resources:

“Eric B. & Rakim - Paid In Full.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Eric B. & Rakim, 24 Dec. 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7t8eoA_1jQ.

“Jesus Walks (Clean) - Kanye West.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Anthony Lee 69, 12 Aug. 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH7SQ1tQk00>.

Lockett, Sharell D. & Shaffer, Tia M. *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*. New York, Routledge, 2017.

“Which Side Are You On? REMIX - Rebel Diaz ft. Dead Prez and Rakaa Iriscience.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Rebel Diaz, 30 April 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSZWslqjfPE>.