

THE HUNTINGTON

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT CURRICULUM GUIDE

FAT HAM



BY
JAMES
IJAMES

DIRECTED BY
STEVIE
WALKER-WEBB

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
ALLIANCE THEATRE
AND FRONT PORCH
ARTS COLLECTIVE



FAT HAM

FAT HAM

By James Ijames

Directed by Stevie Walker-Webb

In association with Alliance Theatre
and Front Porch Arts Collective

SEPTEMBER 22 - OCTOBER 22, 2023
The Huntington at the Calderwood/BCA

527 Tremont Street
Boston, MA 02116

September 2023

No portion of this curriculum guide may
be reproduced without written permission
from The Huntington's Education Department

Inquiries for The Huntington should be directed to:

Meg O'Brien | Director of Education
mobrien@huntingtontheatre.org

*Prepared for The Huntington and The Front Porch Arts
Collective:*

Marisa Jones | Associate Director of Education &
Practical Learning | The Huntington

Frances Hellums | Education Associate | The
Huntington

with contributions from

Pascale Florestal | Director of Education | Front
Porch Arts Collective

Oliver Rizzo | Apprentice | Front Porch Arts Collective

Michelle Jean-Baptiste | Apprentice | Front Porch
Arts Collective

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FAT HAM :	
Standards in English Language Arts	3
Massachusetts Standards in Theatre	4
Find Us Online!	5
Meet the Artists!	6
Themes for Writing and Discussion	13
Guided Comprehension Questions	17
Adventures in S.T.E.A.M.	19
For Further Exploration	21
Suggested Activities	25



STANDARDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

STANDARDS: Student Matinee performances and pre-show workshops provide unique opportunities for experiential learning and support various combinations of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts. They may also support standards in other subject areas such as Social Studies and History, depending on the individual play's subject matter.

Activities are also included in this Curriculum Guide and in our pre-show workshops that support several of the Massachusetts state standards in Theatre. Other arts areas may also be addressed depending on the individual play's subject matter.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 1

- **Grades 9-10:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **Grades 11-12:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 2

- **Grades 9-10:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **Grades 11-12:** Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 3

- **Grades 9-10:** Analyze how complex characters (e.g. those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the themes.
- **Grades 11-12:** Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop related elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure 5

- **Grades 9-10:** Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks), create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

- **Grades 11-12:** Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure 6

- **Grades 9-10:** Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
- **Grades 11-12:** Analyze a case in which grasping point of view required distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7

- **Grades 9-12:** Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g. recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist).

Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 9

- Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

MASSACHUSETTS STANDARDS IN THEATRE

ACTING

- **1.7:** Create and sustain a believable character throughout a scripted or improvised scene (By the end of Grade 8).
- **1.12:** Describe and analyze, in written and oral form, characters' wants, needs, objectives, and personality characteristics (By the end of Grade 8).
- **1.13:** In rehearsal and performance situations, perform as a productive and responsible member of an acting ensemble (i.e., demonstrate personal responsibility and commitment to a collaborative process) (By the end of Grade 8).
- **1.14:** Create complex and believable characters through the integration of physical, vocal, and emotional choices (Grades 9-12).
- **1.15:** Demonstrate an understanding of a dramatic work by developing a character analysis (Grades 9-12).
- **1.17:** Demonstrate increased ability to work effectively alone and collaboratively with a partner or in an ensemble (Grades 9-12).

READING AND WRITING SCRIPTS

- **2.7:** Read plays and stories from a variety of cultures and historical periods and identify the characters, setting, plot, theme, and conflict (By the end of Grade 8).
- **2.8:** Impvise characters, dialogue, and actions that focus on the development and resolution of dramatic conflicts (By the end of Grade 8).
- **2.11:** Read plays from a variety of genres and styles; compare and contrast the structure of plays to the structures of other forms of literature (Grades 9-12).

TECHNICAL THEATRE

- **4.6:** Draw renderings, floor plans, and/or build models of sets for a dramatic work and explain choices in using visual elements (line, shape/form, texture, color, space) and visual principals (unity, variety, harmony, balance, rhythm) (By the end of Grade 8).
- **4.13:** Conduct research to inform the design of sets, costumes, sound, and lighting for a dramatic production (Grades 9-12).

CONNECTIONS

- **Strand 6: Purposes and Meanings in the Arts —** Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings (Grades PreK-12).

- **Strand 10: Interdisciplinary Connections —**

Students will apply their knowledge of the arts to the study of English language arts, foreign languages, health, history and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering (Grades PreK-12).

AUDIENCE AGREEMENTS

Attending live theatre is a unique experience with many valuable educational and social benefits.

To ensure that all audience members can enjoy the performance, please take a few minutes to discuss the following topics with your students before you come to The Huntington.

- How is attending the theatre similar to and different from going to the movies? What behaviors are and are not appropriate when seeing a play? Why?
- Remind students that because the performance is live, the audience's behavior and reactions will affect the actors' performances. No two audiences are the same, and therefore no two performances are the same—this is part of what makes theatre so special! Students' behavior should reflect the level of performance they wish to see.
- Theatre should be an enjoyable experience for the audience. It is absolutely all right to applaud when appropriate and laugh at the funny moments. Side conversations with your friends during the performance, however, are not allowed. Why might this be? Be sure to mention that not only would the people seated around them be able to hear their conversation, but the actors on stage could hear them, too. Theatres are constructed to carry sound efficiently in both directions!
- Any noise or light can be a distraction, so please remind students to turn off their cell phones (or better yet, left at home or at school!). Texting, photography, and video recording are strictly prohibited.
- Food, gum, and drinks are not allowed in the theatre. This includes our lobby spaces before, during, and after the performance.
- Students should sit with their group as seated by the Front of House staff and should not leave their seats once the performance has begun.

FIND US ONLINE!

Did you know The Huntington's website provides students and teachers opportunities to more deeply explore the season's offerings and learn about upcoming events in the Education department?

Utilizing the website at [huntingtontheatre.org](https://www.huntingtontheatre.org) find the answers to the following questions:

1. Which productions are slated for the 23/24 season? How many of these productions will have student matinees?
2. Who is the Artistic Director? How long has she been in this position? What are the primary responsibilities of her job?
3. Your friend broke her foot and needs to use a wheelchair. What accessibility services does The Huntington provide for patrons like her?
4. Review the Huntington's Code of Respect. If you had a question or concern, what email address would you use to contact Huntington Staff?

COME CONNECT!

The Huntington is on Facebook! Like us at [Facebook.com/HuntingtonTheatre.org](https://www.facebook.com/HuntingtonTheatre.org)

We're also on Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok.

 Instagram (@huntingtontheatre)

 X (@huntington)

 TikTok (@huntingtontheatre)

Front Porch Arts Collective is also live on Facebook! Like them at [Facebook.com/thefrontporchartscollective.org](https://www.facebook.com/thefrontporchartscollective.org) and also on Instagram and Twitter.

 Instagram (@thefrontporchartscollective)

 X (@PorchArts)

Connect with us for more content on **FAT HAM** and our **23/24 SEASON!**



The cast of *Fat Ham*. Photo by Nile Hawver,

MEET THE ARTISTS!



Playwright James Ijames.

PLAYWRIGHT JAMES IJAMES: REIMAGINING SHAKESPEARE

On July 13, 2023, James Ijames (eyems) was named TIME Magazine’s “Person of the Week,” calling Ijames the “playwright of the moment.” And with good reason; Ijames is writing plays which resonate with people across the country and inspiring so many with his exploration of Shakespeare, gender norms and the complexity of family dynamics. Ijames is a Pulitzer Prize winning and Tony Award nominated artist who has had his work produced across the country, including at the Steppenwolf Theatre, The National Black Theatre and the The Public Theater in New York City. Playwright, director and educator, Ijames’ gifts are many.

In speaking about how he came to be a critically acclaimed playwright, Ijames has talked about his modest roots and personal struggles. His grandmother told him “to write it down” and this practice became healing for him. Ijames has said, “like so many working class and poor people of color, Black people in particular, we find ways to take care of ourselves. And one of the things that I did was that I wrote.”

But why Hamlet? What relationship does a young person today have with Shakespeare’s most notable work? Ijames has said:

“ It started making me think about the things that we inherit from our families, the things we inherit from society that we don’t really have a whole lot of control over— our possession of them or, that they are things that we have inherited, but we can make some decisions about how we want to interact with that and what we want to do with it and whether or not we want to keep it. Just because someone gives you something doesn’t mean you have to hold onto it. And that felt like a really great vehicle to talk about my own relationship with masculinity. ”

James attended Morehouse College in Atlanta and received an M.F.A. from Temple University. He is currently a Professor of Theatre at Villanova University and resides in South Philadelphia. The Huntington is thrilled to present his critically acclaimed work, *Fat Ham* fresh from Broadway to The Huntington stage this season.

QUESTIONS:

1. Ijames has reflected, “I was thinking about folks that know Shakespeare really well, mostly because I was afraid of them. You know, a little like, ‘Oh, how are they going to be upset’, about how I’m messing with this story?” Do you believe Ijames has “messed up” Hamlet or has he offered something new? How does *Fat Ham* speak to Shakespeare’s original masterpiece?
2. Read the full interview “James Ijames on *Fat Ham*,” episode 207, from the Folger Shakespeare Library. How does Ijames relate his work to the historic work of Shakespeare? Why are the gifts from Shakespeare’s plays that have merit as playwrights create new works today? Follow this link below to read more!



READ ALL ABOUT IT!

Read the full interview
“*James Ijames on Fat Ham*,”
episode 207,
from the Folger
Shakespeare
Library.



**SCAN THE QR CODE
FOR FULL ACCESS!**



Director Stevie Walker-Webb.

A DIRECTOR'S VISION FOR FAT HAM: STEVIE WALKER-WEBB

Tony Award nominated for *Ain't No Mo* and winner of both an Obie Award and New York Times Critics Pick for direction, Stevie Walker-Webb comes to The Huntington with an exciting take on James Ijames' *Fat Ham*. Walker-Webb is also known for his playwriting and social justice work. He believes in the "transformational power of art. As a survivor of poverty and the associative violences that comes with growing up black and poor in America", he has witnessed firsthand the necessity of creating powerful theatre. A Princess Grace and Lorraine Hansberry Award Winner, Walker-Webb's work has been produced all over the world including at The Public Theatre, Woolly Mammoth and the Baltimore Center Stage. A graduate from the University of North Texas, holding an M.F.A. from The New School and founding Artistic Director of Jubilee Theatre.

Walker-Webb sat down with Dawn Simmons, Co-Producing Artistic Director from the Front Porch Arts Collective, to speak about his work on *Fat Ham*.



Dawn Simmons, Co-Producing Artistic Director of the Front Porch Arts Collective.

Dawn: *Fat Ham* explores Blackness and queerness through the lens of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. What are you hoping the audience will take away from the story that could only come from those lenses?

Stevie: I think Black people make everything better. We quite literally made our country a better place to be. I think that what James has done, he's just made *Hamlet* better by bringing Black culture, African American culture to the center of this conversation. I think that *Hamlet* has become one of these plays that even if you love Shakespeare, or if you don't like Shakespeare, it's become one of those plays that almost feels unknowable, unreachable, and unrelatable for a modern audience. There's so much mystique and pedestal energy that we have put around *Hamlet*, and I think *Fat Ham* brings the play back home. It brings the story of *Hamlet* back to its humanity, strips it of all of that artifice that we assign to Shakespeare. It makes it a story that people can touch and be touched by. I'm excited for audiences to experience the intimacy of this family. The script is crafted in such a wonderful way that it feels like it is set in everyone's backyard.

I believe the word universality has become something that's been associated with whiteness and Euro-centric ways of being and thinking, and what James has done is he's taken this story of *Hamlet* and he's said there are universal truths and universal ways of being that are also innate to Black people and to people of color. People are going to connect to it on all of these levels. Then, specifically, through the queer lens, again, in

the same way that Black culture can sometimes be maligned or put to the side, when we think about the “dominant culture”, those are my air quotes, Queer/ LGBTQ culture within the Black community has, historically, been pushed to the side.

James has taken these two ways of being Black and queer and brought them to the center of this classic text, and I think that invites us to rethink what we thought we knew. It challenges us to look at what we often take for granted, and quite literally, makes us reckon with ourselves. Whether or not you’re queer or Black, you’re going to reckon with what you think you know about *Hamlet*, and if you are queer and Black, I think that you’re going to feel seen in a way that you’ve never felt seen before by Shakespeare’s work.

Dawn: I love that. I love the centering and, like you said, that universality that is not just what the road of whiteness, right? We all get universality and this really does pull it out. That’s beautiful. How do you see the vision of this play differing from the Broadway production?

Stevie: The entertainment value of the Broadway production is just like it’s *Broadway*, so it’s like all the bells, all the whistles, everything blown out and I think that sitting in that theater and watching it at that scale was wonderful and it’s special and it’s historical. What I found when I read the play was all of that entertainment is there but I also feel like I knew these people. Coming from the south, coming from the Bible Belt, growing up in a small town, Waco, Texas, I was like, “Oh my God.” I

know that woman, I grew up being hit on in the pew ... fall asleep in church and pay attention to the preacher, but I know that lady and all of those characters, Pap and Rev and Tedra, some of them feel like my mom and dad and my aunties in different ways, different elements of them, right?

I feel like that’s the thing I want to bring to the fore in our production. I’m so excited for people to come to The Huntington to sit down and feel like, “Oh my gosh. I know these folks. They’re not so far away from me actually.” The thing that I love about Black culture is that our culture is so rich, we make and generate culture so quickly that I think that sometimes we don’t understand the value of it because we’re so close to it. I have a quilt that’s 150 years old, that my great-great-great-grandmother quilted 150 years ago, and when I went home one Christmas, I was cleaning out my auntie’s basement, my Aunt Ida, and she had this quilt in the basement covering up all her stuff from Marshalls and Target, all this ... Not to say like this stuff that could be easily replaced, she had this 150 year old quilt being rained on and covering moth-eaten ... It is now living in my bedroom. I think that what James has done with this play is that he’s taken our culture that is already so rich and so valuable and he’s elevated it.

He’s lifted up to our way of speaking, our metric, and our pentameter which has a richness to it that is so valuable. I think that when people come to the theater and they watch this play, they’re going to be like, “Dang. Our culture is just that rich.” That’s what I want to bring to the fore. I want them to feel like they’re watching real



Black Joy. Photo provided by Pexels.

people and I want them to feel like it's their backyard. I think my challenge is to do it even more so than the Broadway production did.

Dawn: What should young people be excited about for this show?

Stevie: Young people are cooler than me. They're so much cooler than us. The only thing I don't like that the young people do is that they say, "Say less" and I just want them to throw that out. You can say, "Ditto" or, "I agree" or, "I understand" but I don't think anyone should ever tell anyone to say less.

I think the young people will feel how cool they are when they watch this play, because it's a multi-generational play, right? One thing that I appreciate about the young folks is they understand that sexuality and identity exist on a spectrum, that all these binary ways of thinking (what is hyper-masculine and what is hyper-feminine, what is heteronormative, what is queer, etc.) all of that is being blurred. I think that young energy is in this play where you see this younger generation of folks questioning what it means to be a sexed person, to have a sexuality. I feel like all of the younger characters, in a way, hold their sexuality with a queer politic, with a queer sensibility. I also think that young people are going to feel so vindicated, especially if you're like me where you grew up in the church and all these parameters around who you can be is pre-set.

There are these great conversations where the young people are challenging the older generation, their parents, to think more deeply about who they are as well. A forever truth is that young people one day will be the older generation, and I think that that's the thing that makes this play evergreen; you get to see these family members practice how to have difficult conversations that push the envelope and push the parameters. I think the older generation will sit in the theater and consider, "Oh, dang. Maybe I should open up the way that I think about my nephew, or my daughter, or my son's sexuality, or how they define themselves." I think that this play is rehearsal for revolutionary conversations with our families. I think the young folks should invite the older people in their family, because I don't think anyone will feel preached at in this play. This play just cracks the door open in a really soft way for people to begin to have bigger conversations about very vulnerable things.

Continue your research of Stevie Walker-Webb and answer the following:

QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss Walker-Webb's activism. For which organizations has he worked and what issues are important to him?
2. Which notable organizations does Walker-Webb maintain an affiliation?
3. List at least three productions on which Walker-Webb has worked? Why do you think he was chosen to direct The Huntington's production of *Fat Ham*.



READ ALL ABOUT IT!

Continue your research of Stevie Walker-Webb.

Visit his website www.steviewalkerwebb.com



SCAN THE QR CODE TO VISIT STEVIE'S SITE!



Huntington Education alum Victoria Omoregie.

ACTOR PROFILE: HUNTINGTON EDUCATION STUDENT ALUM VICTORIA OMOREGIE

Victoria Omoregie will return to The Huntington stages after recently accepting the role of Opal in *Fat Ham*. This production will mark her first professional experience with the company; however, Omoregie is certainly not new to this theatre or the city of Boston. A proud Dorchester native, Omoregie first worked with The Huntington's Education Department in 2015 as part of the department's School Arts Residency program.

This residency centers on learning about August Wilson and his American Century Cycle and what is now known as the National August Wilson New Voices Competition (of which The Huntington's Education Department is a Regional Partner.) Omoregie was a student in Kathleen Osol's drama class at the Muriel J. Snowden International School at Copley, one of the few

public schools in the northeast to offer an International Baccalaureate program to high schoolers. Marisa Jones, the teaching artist in the class remarked, “from the first day of the program it was clear how passionate Tori was about making art. It was also immediately evident that the competition was hers to win, despite her many talented classmates who were also excited about August Wilson’s work.

The day of the classroom competition, Tori’s portrayal of Tonya from *King Hedley II* was simply unmatched. It was no surprise when she went on to place second at the Boston Regional Finals.” As a regional finalist, Omoregie received an all-expenses paid trip to New York City to compete at the national August Wilson Monologue Competition during the spring of 2016, accompanied by her teachers and family. As a young person, Omoregie spoke of her experience in the competition saying, “I like putting myself into other people’s shoes and finding myself in another character ... [the August Wilson Monologue Competition] changed the way I looked at life and made me realize that little changes can make a big change ... to change my mindset and interpret things from a different perspective.”

Following Omoregie’s tremendous participation in high school, she has been an important part of The Huntington family, participating in panel discussions, serving as an adjudicator for Huntington spoken word competitions and willingly volunteering for many Huntington events, including fundraising and Huntington Board meetings. Omoregie received formal acting training at Boston University where she performed in several school productions. She is also a poet and writer who believes that her Black-American and Nigerian culture “contributed to her artistic versatility.” Omoregie has since been cast by Wheelock Family Theater, Actor’s Shakespeare Project and Company One, among others. Omoregie is a multi-hyphenate theatre artist who expresses true artistic depth in every project she pursues. Her theatrical experiences as a young person paved the way for her future career and The Huntington could not be prouder or more excited to welcome her home.



Pascale Florestal, Director of Education at the Front Porch Arts Collective.

Pascale Florestal, Director of Education at the Front Porch Arts Collective and former Huntington Apprentice and HTC Education Associate, spoke with Victoria Omoregie about her educational experiences and exciting career.

Pascale: What character are you playing and what do you love about them?

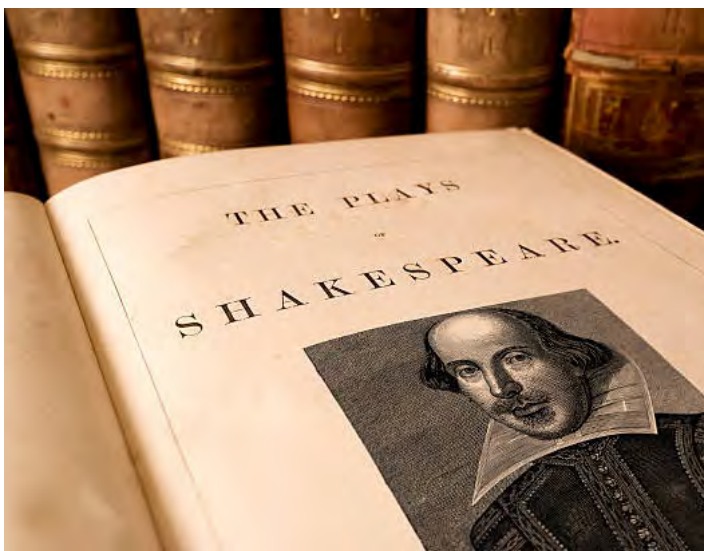
Tori: I am playing OPAL, I love how bold and honest she is. She is that friend that reminds you that you have to always stick up for yourself, be bold about your decisions, and stand tall in who you are and all that makes you, you. That’s what I love about OPAL.

Pascale: What is it about *Fat Ham* that you are excited about exploring?

Tori: I am excited to explore the challenges that the characters face, and how the challenges affect the relationships in this story.

Pascale: Tell us about your experience as an actor, what inspired you to pursue this career?

Tori: I used to do theater and musical theater when I was younger. I took a long gap during middle school. In high school I decided to tap back into theater, and I competed in the August Wilson Monologue Competition. That competition led me to join other finalists in NYC where we got to share our monologues at the August Wilson Theatre on Broadway, see and meet the cast of *Hamilton* (the original cast which was amazing), and *The Color Purple*. I got to meet other actors from across the country, it was a phenomenal experience. I’ll NEVER forget this feeling that came over me, I felt like this was a piece of my heart that was missing. A skill that I had put to sleep, had woken up, and was ready to breathe again. So, I pursued it throughout the rest of high-school, then college, and I have been blessed enough to be constantly



Shakespeare cover page. Photo provided by Pexels.com

working professionally after graduating in 2022! May the ball keep rolling. Hallelujah.

Pascale: What are some of your most favorite recent roles?

Tori: My most favorite recent roles would be: KEISHA from the play *Fairview* by Jackie Sibblies Drury directed by Pascale Florestal! A play that spoke to race in the most powerful and eclectic way. *Antipholus of Ephesus* from *The Bomb-Itty of Errors* by Jordan Allen-Dutton, Jason Catalano, GQ, and Erik Weiner, directed by Christopher V. Edwards! A hip-hop era version of the *Comedy of Errors*.

I love hip hop, rap, and poetry and this show let me play with all three. *JO* in *The Legend of Georgia McBride* by Matthew Lopez directed by Kevin Kolton Bradley! A story about a young man who was an Elvis impersonator that had to transform to a drag queen to make ends meet for his wife. To me this show was more than just about someone making ends meet, but the importance of understanding, and respecting identity.

Pascale: What do you hope the audience will take away from your role in *Fat Ham*?

Tori: I hope audiences feel inspired to be bold enough to be who they are, and to not succumb to anyone or anything that doesn't allow them to bloom. Even themselves, even family. *Fat Ham* is a fabulous unique take on Hamlet, it is transformed to tell a different story, and connect with people in a different way than Shakespeare's Hamlet ever could. There is much beauty, richness, and uniqueness that comes out of you just being you, and I think that is what I want the audience to take away.

QUESTIONS:

1. Considering Omoregie's journey to an acting career, why is it important that schools invest in art education? Even if an individual does not pursue a career in the arts, why do you think art education is essential?
2. Visit www.victoriaomoregie.com and list at least three notable performances from her resume. Has she had experiences outside of theatre? Besides Boston, has Omoregie performed anywhere else?
3. Omoregie says that she has been deeply "moved by life's events and the works of Tupac, Lauryn Hill and many other empathetic lyricists." How might art help to inspire new art? Why do you think these artists are particularly important to her work?

**SCENIC DESIGNER ON *FAT HAM*:
LUCIANA STECCONI**

Originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina, Luciana Stecconi has made a notable career in scenic design in the United States. Her recognitions include an Outstanding Emerging Artist Award (Mayor's Arts Council, Washington DC), Eliot Norton Award for *Witch*, and Boston Critics Association Award. Her projects have included *Art of Burning*, *John Proctor is the Villain*, *Waiting for Godot*



Ghost design / concept. Photo provided by Pexels.

among many others. Stecconi is currently a professor of scenic design at Emerson College. Stecconi answers questions about her work on *Fat Ham*.

How do you see the influence of Shakespeare in the scenic design?

From a visual and design perspective, Shakespeare's plays offer endless possibilities and potential. They often have a few geographical and architectural clues that you can follow, but for the most part they are a blank canvas. You can approach *Macbeth* or *The Tempest* from a thousand different unique ways, which is both extremely exciting and terrifying. Our approach to the spatial world of *Fat Ham* was very different. James Ijames, the playwright, describes a very specific and realistic environment in the stage directions and dialogue. We needed to honor and interpret his words as precisely as possible. I think you will notice a bit of a Shakespearean influence in a few magical moments (there's a ghost figure, as you can probably imagine). We were also very mindful of the need for sides, monologues and characters breaking the fourth wall, some of Shakespeare's strong signatures. It's a subtle, almost imperceptible visual detail, but an important aspect that informed the layout of the design.

There are many magical elements to the show, without spoiling too much what should we expect to see/ experience?

We approached the magic in the play from different angles. Some illusions are very impactful and unexpected (all I will say is that we have a couple of hidden tunnels built into the set), and some of them have a simpler and more evocative "old magic trick" feel. Sometimes less is more, and pure magic can be found in the unexpected appearances and transformations. It's the honest surprise factor, rather than the flashy effects.

What are you most excited to tackle in this scenic design?

The “magic” in the show also comes from visual transformations. The character of Larry has a deep personal shift that Celeste, the Costume Designer, will express through the most fantastic garment you’ll ever see. The challenge was to create a similar transformation on an entire set. We found a way to create an impactful “scene change” without any moving pieces. I’m excited to see this explosion of color and “fireflies” on stage. It’s a moment of celebration and pure joy. The set is extremely hyper-realistic, so I’m also curious and excited to see this represented on stage. I haven’t designed a realistic house backyard before.

How do you see this production being different from the Broadway production?

My personal philosophy as a scenic designer is to not see any photos of previous productions, especially if they are currently running on Broadway or at any other regional theatre, in an effort to avoid any subconscious visual influence on my own design of the production. I was, of course, very interested and excited to see the play in NYC prior to learning I was designing the set for The Huntington/Front Porch/Alliance Theatre co-production, but once I started the design process, I tried to stay away from any imagery of the Broadway show. I think

we found our unique take on it, a familiar but different approach emerging from our particular experiences and connections to the material and from Stevie as the director spearheading this process, and in response to the specific venues we are performing in.

Which character do you most identify with and why?

I connect to several snippets of personalities and lines from different characters, but in terms of overall qualities, I’m drawn to Opal. There’s a halo of certainty and confidence about her. She’s an extremely strong character, and very sure of who she is, even at 19. But it’s her sweetness and unconditional love toward Larry, her brother, that deeply moves me. I, too, have an older brother, and we have this type of dynamic. When she hugs Larry and whispers to him: “I’m so proud of you”, it always brings me to tears.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why is set/scenic design important to the overall quality of the production? How will the set design for The Huntington’s production support the text of the play? Why is it important for designers to read the play?
2. Do you think this designer, Luciana Stecconi, has made a personal connection with the play? How will the design likely reflect the designer’s interpretation of the text if at all?



Skull prop. Photo provided by Pexels.

THEMES FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION

TO BE YOUNG, GIFTED, QUEER & BLACK

James Ijames' *Fat Ham* takes us into a world of Hamlet that is nothing like that which Shakespeare could have imagined. Ijames' *Hamlet* is a Black, queer, curvy, soft man who is mourning the death of his father while struggling with acceptance of who he is in his own family. As Shakespeare's most iconic play, Ijames has achieved a remarkable feat – to experience a gay fantasia exploring themes with which our country is currently grappling – using one of the world's best-known plays as his source. Characters in *Fat Ham* remind us of the strife between these figures in the historic text. *Fat Ham* is certainly prompting a conversation about gender and sexuality. Shakespeare may have intended such themes to be dissected from the text, but Ijames shows us how this is done through a Black, queer lens. An audience is asked to reflect on how these issues seep and meld into our world.

Often adaptations of *Hamlet* include themes of grief, betrayal and revenge, and Ijames makes us question how the intersection of race and gender amplifies the impacts of these themes. Juicy has managed a brave feat by offering to the world his most authentic self – queer, weird, different – even though it caused much strife in his relationship with his father. As Juicy contemplates avenging his father's death, he is forced to consider how this may affect who he is, fundamentally, as a person.

The character of Larry stands in contrast to Juicy. Larry is a person who has made his family incredibly proud, even though it is clear he struggles with knowing who he is. Larry's mother is incredibly proud of Larry's accomplishments while Larry seems rather in awe of Juicy's confidence to be "out of the closet." For Larry, there is no safety outside of that "closet." Opal, the Ophelia of this story, is no longer crazed by her love of Juicy/Hamlet but rather is conflicted by her lack of femininity. Opal, instead of wearing dresses to the family party would prefer to be a "stunt man" bucking all traditional gender norms. Opal is a fierce Black woman who clearly knows herself but is stifled by societal expectations. She dons a dress instead of Converse sneakers and hoodie in order to appease her mother and "not hurt her feelings." Opal, like Larry, struggles with how to be true to herself as the weight of familial expectations of gender and sexuality remains heavy.

The battle for love and acceptance by family is different for Hamlet than it is for Juicy, Opal, and Larry. Certainly, it is moving to see these gifted, funny and compassionate young people face so much rejection. In the same way that betrayal can harm a family, so can rejection by those who should love a person most. What price will these young people pay in search of affirmation and acceptance in their own families?

QUESTIONS:

1. Nina Simone wrote the song, "To Be Young Gifted and Black" in honor of her friend, Lorraine Hansberry. Hansberry's gifts were many and she was not celebrated for her work in a timely way. What is her most famous play? Do you consider Hansberry to be a Queer icon?
2. Who are Audre Lorde and Bell Hooks? How might Opal be inspired by their work? How do these figures represent Black queerness for young people today? What gifts do they share with our world?
3. Do you think Juicy, Opal, and Larry are likely to break from the societal constructs, from relying on parental financial support to dressing a certain way to "fit in" following Rev's untimely death? Do you think they will continue to adhere to the standards set by their family or venture out to find truth for themselves?



You are worthy of Love. Photo provided by Pexels.

HAMLET? MORE LIKE FAT HAM: ADAPTATIONS ACCELERATING THE JUICY STUFF

William Shakespeare: how does this playwright from the past relate to you? It may sound far-fetched - a dead, white, British man, has something to say about today? Yes, but also, no. The answer is somewhere in the middle. Take, for example, the telltale story of the tragic Hamlet. Six deaths in attempts to avenge one.

Must tragic people, sensitive and authentic individuals, be subjected to a tragic end in seeking to express themselves? James Ijames' adaptation *Fat Ham* argues that perhaps not. Perhaps this moment of tragedy can instead be a moment of earned justice and resolved liberation. An argument for joy, even! In *Hamlet*, 9 of the 11 characters are dead by the end of the play. Horatio and Young Fortinbras are the only two to survive. In *Fat Ham*, each character is allowed their freedom of individuality as a resolution, after the death of the oppressive power that enforced conformity (Rev). Ijames allows every character in *Fat Ham* a deserved death. Rev, killed by his own ignorance and toxic masculinity. The rest are metaphorical deaths, each character sheds who they were claiming to be before, and proudly embraces their authentic identity, entering a new life. Opal gets to come out. Larry gets to come out. Juicy chooses kindness and compassion, assisted by natural circumstances. Tedra is free to be on her own. Rabby gets to live on as a proud mother. There is a shift so life changing that it can be argued as a death of sorts, into a rebirth.

Adaptations allow for some give and take. Ijames chose the parts that resonated with him and worked hard to keep them rather than let them go. The structure of the classic texts inspires new works today and grounding them in this way only strengthens their message. Take the classics and make them your own- make Hamlet, Juicy.

But wait... what happens in Hamlet anyway?

Hamlet is a story of grief, justice, and revenge. In Shakespeare's telling, it is Denmark around the 14th century. The mood is eerie and forewarning, it feels like there is a ghost around. And in fact, there is one; Hamlet Senior who has been succeeded by his brother Claudius. Before Hamlet Senior's death, Hamlet was a hopeful romantic prince and in love with Ophelia, a bright and kind noblewoman. After, Claudius has not only stolen Hamlet Senior's throne, but also his wife and Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. This does not sit well with Hamlet. As he spirals, he ends up woefully neglecting Ophelia due to his all-consuming revenge. His feelings of grief are even further perpetrated by a dad-ghost sighting of his own. This thirst for revenge has Hamlet all twisted up and persuaded into a lavish scheme to avenge the death of his father.

Serendipitously, in Shakespeare's version, there is a group of theatre players to entertain and celebrate the new King. In attempts to expose his uncle's crimes, Hamlet convinces the players to perform the events

of Claudius' crime for all to see. Guilty and called out, Claudius storms off to pray. Hamlet then attempts to kill Claudius in prayer but decides that someone killed in such a position would likely go to heaven. So, Hamlet felt inclined to postpone his long sought after revenge. And although he is not caught, he does in a moment of confusion, kill a member of the court. A man named Polonius who also happens to be Ophelia & Laertes' father.

Knowing when it's best to leave, Hamlet flees the country. Upon his return, he learns of Ophelia's death, caused by a combination of his absence and the death of her father. At the same time, the last of his family, Laertes, seeks revenge after Hamlet's crimes are



King. Photo provided by Pexels.

alluded to by the new King. With an aligned goal of killing Hamlet, Laertes challenges him to a duel before the King. But Claudius wants to make sure the deed is done for good, and poisons Laertes' blade. Hamlet arrives at the duel with a similar idea. He plans to finally get his revenge properly and places poison in Claudius' chalice. After a dramatically serious sword fight, Laertes is fatally wounded by his own venomous blade, but unfortunately Hamlet is too. In the last moments of the play, Gertrude toasts to Hamlet's seeming victory with the glass intended for Claudius and chokes to death! Overwhelmed with grief, pain, and vengeance, Hamlet uses his last moments of lucidity, to force the same drink down Claudius' throat. Finally, Hamlet Senior is avenged. Poignantly, Horatio holds Hamlet in his last moments before death. Horatio sits alone, one of only two survivors in the entire story (the other being Young Fortinbras, who...doesn't do much in the play...)

It is within this type of tragedy that Shakespeare chose to illustrate cycles of violence that entrap wounded hearts. Demonstrating that in the end, it was the poison of revenge that led to Hamlet's death. Where we watch the royal family of Denmark devolve into chaos in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; we witness a fate far more tender for the characters of *Fat Ham*. James Ijames applies the framework of this classic to create a relatable tale with the same message but with a subversive finale. It is an example of subverting the expectations that lie within the tragedy of *Hamlet* and its story of revenge. *Fat Ham* instead highlights the justified karma of theatrical fate. After the leering shadow of expectation dies, we see an evolution to freedom for all the characters in our play. In the end, this play employs community care; to allow one another to feel, catharsis, emote, celebrate, and live and let live.

QUESTIONS:

1. How does knowing more about Shakespeare's *Hamlet* change your experience of reading or seeing *Fat Ham*?
2. What "classic story" would you like to be adapted similarly to James Ijames' *Fat Ham*?
3. How is *Fat Ham* like *Hamlet*? How is it different?
4. How would you categorize *Hamlet* (history, tragedy, comedy, or romance)? How would categorize *Fat Ham*?
5. "History is written by victors." This is a quote often attributed to Winston Churchill, though the origin is unknown. Do you agree or disagree with the suggestion that the "winners" or those in power choose the narrative for how history is shared and remembered?

BLACK FATHERHOOD: LEADING WITH LOVE & AVOIDING TOXIC EXPECTATIONS

September 28th, 1918, was expected to be a day to remember. The air was filled with the sounds of marching bands, horns and drums pounding in unison with the steps of the procession and its 200,000 spectators. The atmosphere was charged with a sense of American pride, and the determination to see the war through to victory was palpable. As bands, Boy Scouts, military troops, local organizations, and bond salesmen paraded through the streets, onlookers cheered wildly. Organized to help promote the fourth Liberty Loan Drive of World War 1, the parade hoped to boost morale and encourage the purchase of special government war bonds used to fund the American war effort.

Although the United States now has a defense budget of over 800 billion dollars, this was not the case in 1918. The United States began issuing 'Liberty Bonds' in 1917 to raise money for the ongoing World War. The bonds created a way for Americans to individually lend the government money with the promise of receiving their money back in six to ten years. Often these bonds would be purchased at less than face value allowing individuals



Expectations. Photo provided by Pexels.

to theoretically make a small profit when selling them back, but the driving force behind making these purchases was generally a sense of duty and patriotism and not a strategic financial decision. Over the course of five campaigns, the United States government raised approximately 21.5 billion dollars from over 66 million Americans- a full third of the US population. Parades like the one that took place on that fateful September day were just one of the ways that federal and local governments worked to keep morale and patriotism high while boosting sales.

Anyone in attendance at the Philadelphia parade would have told you it would be a day to go down in the history books, but it was unlikely most of them would have been able to predict why. The parade is now remembered not for the boisterous celebration but for its tragic aftermath. Black fatherhood's depiction is one that often supports hateful stereotypes; these stereotypes have plagued the image and understanding of the Black family. Although these narratives are a caricature and should hold no weight in American culture, they have nonetheless impacted Black families. Black fathers are often stigmatized, characterized as being absent and failing to provide for the family unit. To think wholistically about Black fatherhood in the United States, one cannot discount the very real disadvantages Black men have faced, from racism to mass incarceration in the Prison Industrial Complex, the Black family structure has been negatively impacted. Of course, Black fathers are an integral part of the family unit and most Black fathers are present and active in their families – and if we are honestly accounting, Black fathers in general have historically played a vital role in their homes despite negative prevalent stereotypes.

James Ijames's *Fat Ham*, however, introduces an interesting dynamic as the play asks its readers and audience to experience Black fatherhood through a multicolored lens; those watching or reading this play must consider the dance of masculinity. Fatherhood becomes of central concern throughout the play as Juicy navigates the experience of two "father" figures; one in the past and the other experienced in the present. Juicy's father and uncle have outlined a harmful blueprint for young Juicy by advocating for violence. Instead of denouncing their toxic understanding of manhood, these male figures use their titles of "father" as a tool to leverage more violence and in turn negatively influence



Philadelphia. Photo provided by Pexels.

Juicy. While neither one considers the cycle that will inevitably continue if behaviors remain unchanged, Juicy finds a way of denouncing the harmful expectations of his father and uncle. He works to break the cycle before he becomes a victim of it. For Juicy, his relationship with his father is complicated and difficult. Juicy loves and respects his father, and in his grief, he tacitly agrees to avenge his father's death. Juicy's reactions are understandable for a young man who has just lost a significant male figure in his life; a life lost under violent and mysterious circumstances.

Ijames does not shy away from Juicy's complex emotional journey through the loss of his father and directly addresses the gruesome reality of his father's death. Violence is a character in this play. And many of the male figures in *Fat Ham* must grapple with their own frustrations and fears which turn to violence rather than finding a healthy way to experience and express intense emotions. The struggle often results in harm to people in their own family. Juicy is introduced to the audience as a person with a tremendous heart, a sweet and charismatic young man who loves his family and his father. Juicy is willing to defend his family name and uphold his father's wishes, but underneath his loyalty there is a shadow of hurt, resentment, and a burning desire to be liberated from the men who have hurt him. Ijames does a great job of harnessing the essence of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* while still creating a story that is true to itself. Though the journeys of Juicy and *Hamlet* are different, they must both face society's idealizations of "manhood". From the standpoint of these characters, the weight of a father's expectation on his son may ultimately shift the trajectory of the young man's life, implicating even his role in the family. Both Pap and Old *Hamlet* appear to their sons with a request for revenge, honor, and to secure a legacy; a responsibility that they each navigate in their own respective stories.

A reimagined outcome would only be possible if these men had approached their heirs differently, to speak love and truth to them, while guiding them to be protectors of their family instead of fighters for it. Vengeance is a key theme in both stories and must play its role. But for Juicy, his father figures missed an opportunity to harness his love for his family rather than remain in a cycle of violence and death.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you believe there is moral justification for Juicy avenging his father's death?
2. Do you believe Pap's death was avenged? Why or why not?
3. Would you be willing to attend your mother's wedding under the circumstances Juicy faces? What factors complicate Juicy's relationship with his mother?



Wedding flowers. Photo provided by Pexels.

GUIDED COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS



Thomika Marie Bridwell (Rabby), James T. Alfred (Rev/Pap) and Ebony Marshall-Oliver (Tedra) during rehearsal of *Fat Ham*. Photo still by Kathy Wittman.

1. When and where is the play set? Where is the play “not happening”?
2. What is Juicy doing as the lights come up?
3. How is Juicy related to Tio?
4. According to Tio, who “swooped in and pulled” Juicy’s mom?
5. When Pap appears to Juicy what is his reasoning for wearing a sheet?
6. How did Pap die?
7. Why is Juicy not surprised by his father’s death?
8. For what reason does Pap believe his death should be avenged?
9. Where does Juicy go to school and what does he hope to do with the degree?
10. Why does Pap suggest that Juicy should not eat candy bars?
11. Why did Pap kill Boogie?
12. How are Pap and Rev related?
13. What is Tedra wearing when she arrives at the house?
14. Who does Juicy believe killed his father?
15. Juicy’s tuition money is gone. How was the money spent?
16. If Rev and Tedra sell the restaurant what does she want to do with the proceeds?
17. Juicy changes for the party. What does his shirt say?
18. How does Tedra respond when Rev punches Juicy in the face?
19. Is Tedra “happy”? Is she “in love” with Rev?
20. For which branch of the military does Larry serve?
21. What reason does Rev give for punching Juicy?
22. Why did Larry wear his uniform to the party?
23. What was one terrible thing that Pap did to Tedra during their marriage?
24. Why is Opal wearing a dress when she arrives at the party? Is she comfortable?
25. Why does Opal find it funny that Juicy is pursuing a career in Human Resources?
26. How does Opal describe her sexual orientation? How does Juicy describe his?
27. Does Opal plan on “doing the debutante”?
28. What did Tedra buy during the Amazon Flash Sale?
29. During the game charades, Juicy performs which soliloquy for the audience?
30. How do they determine who will go first in the game of charades?
31. What is the title of the book that Larry ultimately guesses?
32. What feelings do Juicy and Larry admit that they have for each other?

33. Pap returns. In his view, what are the “parameters” of the pact he made with Juicy?
34. Why does Tedra believe that Juicy is “going crazy”?
35. Tio arrives late to the party and announces someone has died. Who is it and how did this person die? How is the family covering the funeral expenses?
36. What is Opal’s plan for her future career? What does Larry hope to do for a living?
37. For what does Larry want Juicy to apologize? When Juicy won’t, what does Larry do to him?
38. What is Rabby’s secret?
39. What secret does Rev believe Juicy has exposed? Does Tedra believe Juicy?
40. On what does Rev choke? Does Rev let Juicy help him? Does Rev survive?
41. According to Rabby at what age did her mom die?
42. After Rev dies, what happens to the partygoers?
43. How has Larry transformed by the play’s end?



Marshall W. Mabry (Juicy) in *Fat Ham*. Photo by Nile Hawver.



Image of Juicy from the animated trailer for *Fat Ham*. Image provided by The Bearded Boys.

ADVENTURES IN S.T.E.A.M.

What is a theater prop? A prop (short for property) is any object used in a play that isn't part of the set or an actor's costume. An example of a prop would be a cell phone, a kitchen whisk, a book, etc.

Q&A with The Huntington's Properties Director, Kristine Holmes

Kris Holmes is the Properties Director, overseeing the prop shop at The Huntington Theatre Company where she has made her career for over three decades. She has put her artistic skills to work for nearly two-hundred productions, assisting others in realizing their designs. These productions include *Hedda Gabler* and *Private Lives*, both of which made their way to Broadway. One of her recent design endeavors was Kiss at ArtsEmerson. Summer vacations find Kris traveling with PBS' "Antiques Roadshow" as the set decorator. Kris agreed to talk about her work and the intersection of art and science at The Huntington's Production Center.

How does a young person prepare for a career in Properties?

If you enjoy theatre, TV, or movies and you find the backgrounds and the little details that are on the set or handled by the actors and have a curiosity for the history of things. That is a great start. If you like art and enjoy creating things out of many different materials that's even better. You can start volunteering for your school productions to help find things. If you have a community theatre in the area volunteering to work backstage can get you some experience. Volunteering for organizations that build homes for people can get you some experience in carpentry. Take as many Art classes as you can. Draw and paint on your own or get some modeling clay and start sculpting. MassArt has youth programs for high school students one could contact them to see what's available. There are so many skills that can be learned on YouTube. Just about any skill you can learn applies to props. Carpentry, welding, sewing, upholstery, sculpting/casting, painting, and computer skills in programs like Photoshop Illustrator, Excel and Word all apply. You don't need to know it all. I know people that have successful careers by being good in just a couple of disciplines. You can go the path of a college degree in theatre or go to art school or you can also just start creating and keeping record of it and start a portfolio. Getting a job running shows at a theatre is a skill that can be a good entry-level position that may allow you to move up in the ranks of a theatre.

Would you please share your educational and career experiences which brought you to The Huntington?

I have loved the theatre for as long as I can remember. My parents took me to see lots of different types of entertainment when I was little, and I think that is where my fascination started. I took acting classes at a community theatre in middle school and that got me familiar with the theatre and when I was old enough, I volunteered to work backstage painting and building things. When I was in high school, I worked backstage on all the shows. There was always a need for people backstage. I was also lucky in that my dad was an architect and a carpenter and allowed me to help him in his shop. That was a bit of a rarity in the time in which I grew up. I went to school for theatre, first at a community college and then finished my degree at a state university. My degree was in Scene Design because props was not considered a separate field of study. Now there are many universities where you can get a Bachelor or Master's degree in Props. When I graduated, I knew someone here in Boston already working in theatre and he got me my first job. I worked for the Opera Company of Boston first in Costumes and Wardrobe and then when a job opened in Props, I took that. I did quite a bit of freelancing all around town. Sometimes it was just a single project build and sometimes it was putting a whole props package together for a theatre company. I worked as a Props Director and larger theatre on the south shore for about 4 years before the prop job at the The Huntington opened up.



Crown prop. Photo provided by Pexels.

How long have you worked at The Huntington?

I have been at The Huntington for 32 years.

What title or positions have you held?

My only job at The Huntington has been as the Props Director. In my years at The Huntington I have been allowed to continue working on freelance projects with WGBH, Disney, High Output New England Conservatory and a variety of smaller theatres in town.

Describe a typical day for you at the Production Center.

A typical really depends on where we are in the process of building a show. At the beginning, as Drawings and Research are coming in from the designer, we are reading scripts, making lists of the items in the script, and what the designer has given us. We start by making a picture inventory of the props in our stock and doing research for what can be purchased. With drawings from the designer, we do materials calculations for purchase of materials.



The King. Photo provided by Pexels.

Following that we start gathering items to take to rehearsal and start building items that can't be found or are too expensive to purchase. We also gather items that will just be used to create the environment items we would use to dress the set.

When we load in, we bring all the things that are used on the walls and shelves and hang all the light fixtures. The items that we have for load in are things that the actors don't really interact with or items that won't work in the rehearsal hall, like curtains.

Tech week is where it all comes together, and we see things in the space and under light and see if all the things we have acquired work together

What kind of projects do you work on?

In the shop the projects that I work on other than making sure everything is being built on schedule would include ordering supplies, shopping for props, sewing, and upholstery projects. I also like to build and wire lighting fixtures. Sometimes these are built from pieces and parts we order and assemble, and some are adaptations of fixtures to change their look.

Do you ever work on projects which are not related to a show being actively produced?

Yes, we try and maintain the shop by cleaning and serviceing tools. We also maintain stock by organizing, cataloging and photographing items in so we know where things are. We also work on projects for other companies, theatres and film, and have even built some things for advertising.

Much of the work that happens at a production center like The Huntington's could be characterized as both "an art and a science." How do you use both art and science to create props for The Huntington's season?

I think that the work we do always incorporates Art and Science. Building Props requires an artistic ability and we use Science to get things built. Sometimes it's a bit of trial and error to find out what materials don't work with each other but over the years I have figured out that there are certain things that react with one another that just don't mesh. Some glues you can use on a material and sometimes they never dry or actually eat the material. Paints are like that, too. What works on wood melts plastic. We are constantly using Math in figuring out yardage and lumber. Geometry is used in construction of furniture to figure out angles and over all dimensions. Math is used in figuring out how many pleats to use in curtains or how to cut a mat for a painting we are framing.

Do you have questions about working in theatre? Is there a particular job in Production that you would like to know more about?

Send questions and ideas for S.T.E.A.M articles to **Marisa Jones**, Associate Director of Education. & Practical Learning by emailing mjones@huntingtontheatre.org

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

HAMLETS THROUGH THE AGES: A PHOTO STORY

Hamlet has long been regarded as one of Shakespeare's most well-loved plays. By almost any measure it falls within the top 5 and even top 3 of the most read and produced of Shakespeare's 38 plays. *Hamlet* is dated to the year 1600 and the titular role was most likely originated by Richard Burbage, star actor of Lord Chamberlains Men. It has become a career defining role taken on by innumerable actors in the four hundred plus years since its conception.

Below is just a sampling of those great actors



John Gielgud, various stages, 1910 onward.
Photo provided by roguesandvagabonds.com

John Gielgud, various stages, 1910 onward

Gielgud played Hamlet over 500 times in theatres across the world. He is widely considered to be the defining Hamlet of the 20th century.



Laurence Olivier, film, 1948. Photo provided by criterion.com

Laurence Olivier, film, 1948

Olivier played Hamlet in the Old Vic Theatre's 1937 production. In 1948 Olivier both directed and starred in an award-winning film production that closely followed the 1937 stage interpretation.



David Warner, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1965. Photo provided by the [Royal Shakespeare website](http://RoyalShakespeare.com).

David Warner, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1965

Warner was just 24 when he played Hamlet making him the youngest to do so in the history of the RSC.



Johnathan Pryce, Royal Court Theatre, 1980.
Photo provided by thetimes.co.uk

Johnathan Pryce, Royal Court Theatre, 1980

This production saw Hamlet literally possessed by the ghost of his father. The audience goes on to learn that the only way for Hamlet to remove the spirit from his body is to seek revenge against Claudius.



Mark Rylance in Hamlet, 2000. Photo provided by bl.uk (British Library Collection).

Mark Rylance, various stages, 1989

Similarly to Gielgud, Rylance has played Hamlet countless times, notably with the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1989 and then again in 2000 at the Globe.



Mel Gibson, film, 1990. Photo provided by rottentomatoes.com

Mel Gibson, film, 1990

Gibson's only onscreen performance of the title role.



Angela Winkler, *Edinburgh Festival*, 2000. Photo provided by [Frankfurter Rundschau website](https://www.frankfurter-rundschau.de).

Angela Winkler, Edinburgh Festival, 2000

Winkler, although not the first woman to play the role, is widely considered the most notable female performance. Typically Hamlet is played as a man regardless of the actor's gender, but in this production, Winkler performed the character of Hamlet as a woman.



Papaa Essiedu, *Royal Shakespeare Company*, 2016. Photo provided by [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com).

Papaa Essiedu, Royal Shakespeare Company, 2016

In 2016, Essiedu became the first Black actor to take on the role of Hamlet in the entirety of the Royal Shakespeare Company's 61-year history. The production was set in not in Denmark, but in West Africa.



Ato Blankson-Wood, *The Public at The Delacorte Theatre*, 2023. Photo provided by [timeout.com](https://www.timeout.com).

Ato Blankson-Wood, The Public at The Delacorte Theatre, 2023

This past summer, Blankson-Wood starred as Hamlet on the legendary Delacorte Theatre stage. This production joins a 120-plus year history of Shakespearian plays produced by the Public Theatre in Central Park.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you notice a shift in the types of actors playing the role of Hamlet throughout history?
2. If you have read the play *Hamlet*, what do you think makes this such a coveted role in classical theatre?
3. How does Juicy's character in *Fat Ham* fit into the evolution and perception of the Hamlet trope?



Shakespeare book binding. Photo provided by Pexels.

JUICY'S CAREER OBJECTIVE: HUMAN RESOURCES

In general, a primary asset of a company or business is its people, often referred to as human capital or human resources. A human resources department is one that connects the workers to the management of the organization and helps from every aspect of employment from posting a job to selecting and enrolling employees into retirement plans. The human resources (HR) department may oversee the hiring process, organize benefits from paid vacation to health insurance, help manage employee reviews, ensuring that all employees are getting what they need. HR is often considered a legal arm of the business, ensuring that labor laws are followed, from the age of workers using heavy machinery to employees taking an appropriate number of breaks in a given workday. HR usually oversees payroll and is responsible for logging employees hours, which may result in accruals of paid sick time, parental leave and vacation days. The human resources department was first utilized in the early 1900s and has been proven to be valuable for business leaders and staff alike – when workers have a department with which to file grievances and wage and hour violations, and when employees are treated fairly and respectfully, individuals tend to report more job satisfaction.

1. Do you think Juicy would make a good HR representative? If you were an employee do you think it would be easy to go to Juicy with a problem about your supervisor or ask a question about sick time? What about his character makes you think Juicy would be right for the job?
2. What other functions might the HR department serve? Could you see yourself in the future working for an HR department?
3. Some have said that the phrase “human resources” is problematic; humans should not be considered an asset or capital for any business but should instead be uniquely celebrated for their individual gifts and talents. What other phrases could be used instead and how might you rename this department?

GIFTS OF AN EMPATH: BENEFIT OR BURDEN?

Do people often say you have great intuition, are emotionally sensitive, or suggest you take on too much? If so, you might be an empath. Typically, an empath is described as someone who doesn't just relate to an experience but feels the emotional reaction to a situation as it is being recounted. An empath shows incredible understanding with regard to other's emotions and can easily sense what another person is feeling. Being an empath is in fact different from having empathy for a friend who is going through something hard. Having empathy will include showing support; an empath's reaction might be to take on the burden or the struggle the friend faces through feeling those intense emotions too. When Rabby asks if Juicy is being “sensitive,” Juicy



Human Resources. Photo provided by Pexels.

responds “I’m an empath” (p. 49). Rabby seems to understand what Juicy is saying while Rev is dismissive and uninterested in his nephew’s feelings. Given Rev’s behavior in the play, it is safe to assume Rev is not an empath as he shows very little care or consideration for others. Rev in other words is not burdened by the emotional needs of those around him including Pap, Tedra and Juicy. As a result, Rev is able to move forward with his objectives with little disruption from his own conscience, while Juicy must weigh many feelings and perspectives as he makes choices throughout the play.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you agree with Juicy that he is an empath? What evidence can you cite to support your answer?
2. Does Juicy act without empathy at any point in the play?
3. Often empaths take on the concerns of others at the expense of their own needs. Does this happen to Juicy as the play unfolds?
4. Do you think it is advantageous to be an empath? How might taking on the emotions of others present challenges in an individual’s life?

To read more on this topic follow this link: https://www.womenshealthmag.com/life/a40435738/empath-meaning/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=arb_ga_whm_md_pmx_us_urlx_20196160291&gclid=EAlaIqobChMI0que0JC-wIVbBKzAB231wSTEAMYASAAEgKClvD_BwE

JACOB & ESAU: BIBLICAL REFERENCES

“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.”

Genesis 25:22-23

In the first book of the Bible, a story is recounted about the fate of fraternal twins, Esau and Jacob who were said to have fought with each other even before birth. When their mother, Rebekah prayed for her sons she received a message from God that from these two births two nations would be born, but that her younger son would ultimately rise to power. Jacob, with the help of his mother, steals the birthright from his older brother Esau. The birthright preordained leadership and judicial authority even over the patriarch of the family; this blessing was typically bestowed upon the oldest son. Biblical scholars and historians alike have argued over the meaning of this ancient text, many arriving at the conclusion that good works alone is not enough to secure Heavenly salvation and that an individual must instead be chosen by God. Despite tricking Esau into selling his birthright for stew and a piece of bread and later deceiving his father into believing he was Esau to secure it, Jacob managed to establish power for himself and his descendants.

QUESTIONS:

1. In Hebrew the name Jacob means “seizing by the heel” suggesting that even as he and his brother Esau were being born, Jacob tried to pull his brother back. If Jacob had been successful he would have immediately received the blessing of the oldest son. Do you think that being a first born child offers more benefits or responsibilities? Are you the oldest or only child in your family? Do you think birth order plays a role in the person you are today?
2. Why do you think this Biblical story is referenced in *Fat Ham*? What connection do you make between these brothers and the characters in the play?
3. In *Fat Ham*, the characters make a couple references to their experiences as “biblical” in nature – what do you think is meant by this turn of phrase?

To read more about follow this link: <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/jacob-and-esau-in-the-bible.htm>



Holy Bible. Photo provided by Pexels.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES



Fat pig. Photo provided by Pexels.

WHO'S WHO IN FAT HAM?

Fat Ham is an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. When writing the character descriptions for *Fat Ham*, playwright James Ijames goes so far as to directly reference the characters of *Hamlet*. In order to recognize some of the deeper themes in *Fat Ham*, it helps to have a basic understanding of the play that inspired it.

FAT HAM CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS:

- **JUICY** is thicc. 20-21, Black. He's beautiful. He is lonely. He is smart. A kind of Hamlet.
- **TEDRA** is Juicy's mother. 45-50, Black. She is a good mother. A kind of Gertrude
- **REV** is Tedra's husband. 45-50, Black. Her dead ex-husband's brother. Pig farmer and pit master. Electric. A kind of Claudius. Same actor as PAP
- **OPAL** is one of Juicy's only friends. 19-20. Black. She loves Ham and worries about him. A kind of Ophelia.
- **LARRY** a boy that is attracted to Juicy. 21-23. Black. A marine. Trying to heal from PTSD. Has a secret. Awkward. A kind of Laertes.
- **RABBY** is Larry and Opal's mother. 40-45. Black. Tedra's friend. Semi-churchy but honestly she just wanna drink and praise the Lord. A kind of Polonius.
- **PAP** is the Ghost of Juicy's father. Appears 45ish. Black. Was in prison for killing someone cause their breath stank, til he got shanked on the way to dinner. A kind of Hamlet's Father. Same actor as REV.
- **TIO** is clever. 20-40. Black or Afro-Latinx. Juicy's cousin. Oldest friend. A kind of Horatio.

HAMLET CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS:

- **Hamlet:** The Prince of Denmark. Hamlet is the son of Gertrude and the now deceased Old King Hamlet. Hamlet is Claudius' nephew and Ophelia's boyfriend. He is a young scholar struggling to cope with his father's death and mother's remarriage.
- **Gertrude:** The Queen of Denmark. Gertrude is mother to Hamlet and the widow of Old King Hamlet. Shortly after Old King Hamlet's death, Gertrude marries his brother, Claudius.
- **Claudius:** Brother of the deceased Old King Hamlet, Claudius is Hamlet's uncle. He has recently married his brother's widow, Gertrude.
- **Ophelia:** Daughter of Polonius and sister to Laertes. Ophelia has been in a relationship with Hamlet, but recently her father has directed her not to see him anymore.

- **Laertes:** Son of Polonius and brother to Ophelia. Laertes is leaving Denmark for his studies. He is protective of his sister.
- **Polonius:** Lord Chamberlain, a member of Claudius' court. Polonius is the father of Ophelia and Laertes. He does not like Ophelia seeing Hamlet.
- **Old Hamlet:** King of Denmark until his untimely death. Married to Gertrude and father to Hamlet. The play begins when he returns as a ghost to speak to Hamlet.
- **Horatio:** Hamlet's closest friend. Horatio begins the play as one of the first to see Old King Hamlet's ghost, and ends the play as one of the only surviving characters.

Character description questions:

1. What traits are shared by the characters in *Fat Ham* and *Hamlet*?
2. Does having an understanding of the characters in *Hamlet* affect your understanding of the characters in *Fat Ham*?

A VERY BRIEF SUMMARY OF HAMLET...

Hamlet was written by William Shakespeare in the year 1600. It is one of his most well-known tragedies and takes place over 5 acts. The play begins when the titular character, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, returns home following his father's death and the remarriage of his mother. Shortly after his father's death, Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, has married Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, who now takes the throne as the King of Denmark. One night, the ghost of Hamlet's father appears to Hamlet. He reveals that he was murdered by his brother Claudius and needs Hamlet to revenge his death.

Hamlet sets out to find proof of what his ghost has told him. Meanwhile, Claudius, Gertrude, and a member of their court, Polonius, worry about Hamlet's mental wellbeing, attributing his recent odd behavior to an infatuation with Polonius' daughter Ophelia. After getting the proof he needed, Hamlet speaks to his mother and stabs a man he sees hiding in the room. He believes it to be Claudius but really it is Polonius! With Polonius dead, Ophelia makes the decision to end her life.

The last act of the story sees a duel between Hamlet and an angry Laertes. Laertes is Polonius' son and Ophelia's brother. The duel culminates in the deaths of Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude; a true Shakespearian tragedy.

Summary Questions:

1. What plot points do *Fat Ham* and *Hamlet* share? What differs between the two plots?
2. Does having an understanding of the plot of *Hamlet* impact your understanding of the plot of *Fat Ham*?

Now that you know about the two plays... from the partial *Hamlet* cast list below, connect the characters from the two plays.

Hamlet cast list with corresponding *Fat Ham* characters. For example, Juicy "is a kind of Hamlet."

Fill in the blanks!

Hamlet: Juicy

Gertrude:

Claudius:

Ophelia:

Laertes:

Polonius:

Horatio:

The Late King Hamlet:

1. Which *Hamlet* character inspired the characters in *Fat Ham*?
2. In what ways are the characters similar? In what ways are they different?
3. Are there characters in *Hamlet* not mentioned here which may have also contributed to James Ijames' inspiration for character development?

“A KIND OF HAMLET”: SHAKESPEARE INSPIRED NEW PLAY

Continue your comparison of *Fat Ham* and *Hamlet*.

Hamlet is one of the most interesting character studies written in English literature.

How are the characters in *Fat Ham* and their experiences related to the original source material?

PLOT POINTS	CHARACTERS	LITERARY DEVICES/ LANGUAGE	THEMES
Transfer of power within the family.			
		Use of foreshadowing in both texts.	
			The moral struggle to avenge a father’s death.
	Parallels between plays. Juicy/Hamlet		

Continue the table to allow for as many topics as possible.

1. Share your table with the class. How does your table differ from your classmates’ finished products?
2. These plays share some similarities as you’ve noted in the table above, but now identify the ways in which *Fat Ham* differs from the play which inspired its writer.
3. If you were to modernize a play written by Shakespeare, which one would you choose and why would you choose it? How would you make it accessible for a youth audience seeing the production today?



Think about things differently. Photo provided by Pexels.



Family BBQ. Photo provided by Pexels.

QUOTABLE MOMENTS

Choose one of the following quotes from *Fat Ham*; write an essay analyzing the quote's meaning.

Consider the following:

- Who said the line?
- Does the character mean it literally or is there unspoken subtext?
- What does this statement reveal about the character's view of the world?
- How do the character's actions support or contradict the quote?
- How does the quote contribute to the forward progression of the scene and of the plot as a whole?

Scam. Who goes to college online to learn how to manage human beings. Them things don't go. p. 11

You not hungry, you greedy. p. 12

He locked up for eternity. He doesn't seem to be in hell. Which makes me contemplate the after life and purgatory and angels and my own mortality and what have you. He too evil to be in heaven. What do you do when God don't want you and the devil won't have you. p. 14

My memory of him won't let me miss him. p. 21

I don't think of it as whether I love him or don't love him. I just ... I mean. He my daddy. That means something. p. 23

These cycles of violence are like deep ... Hell, engineered. Hard to come out of. Like, your Pop went to jail, his Pop went to jail, his Pop went to jail, his Pop went to jail and what's before that? Huh? Slavery. p. 23

You was powerful when you were a baby. Moon seemed to hang from your pinky nail ... But then you grew up a little bit and you got soft... Look at this little pocket of nothing. p. 31

Hirable skills. He ain't out here musing. He know how to kill people. You can't even slaughter a hog p. 40

They done already made up they minds about what I'm worth ... But you make it plain up in here 'bout the facts. I don't want them saying nothing about my life choices and why I did what I did. p. 44

Well ... Missing him don't cost nothing so ... carry on. p. 47

You should see how she looks at me sometimes. Utterly confused. But like ... SHE MADE ME! p. 55

That's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna become so mean and brutal and awful that you won't be able to recognize it's me no more. I'm gonna become my opposite of what I've been. New. p. 69

The Preacher Killed the Cook! The Preacher Killed the Cook! p. 75

I got better plans for you two. Opal you going to college and Larry you gonna be a general. p. 76

It's plays on a loop in your minds eye. You keep sitting in the stew and the stink of the whole memory. It don't make you special. p. 79

Opulent. You feel like a fabric that costs too much. p. 82

*What a piece of work is a man! p. 85 *From what original text is this line taken?*

You always talk about how people treat you. But you can be cruel Juice. You not perfect. That wasn't yours to share. p. 100

Well we all just learned some thing about each other and uh... I just wanna say I think this new level of transparency and vulnerability is just so refreshing. p. 102



Online college. Photo provided by Pexels.

CRITICAL REVIEW!

As an Arts Critic for a large local news organization, you have been sent to The Huntington to attend a performance of *Fat Ham*. Arts Critics have the important job of informing the community when a show is not to be missed! Write a review of the performance and offer your opinions about the following theatrical elements:

Direction

How did Stevie Walker-Webb bring James Ijames' play to life? Do you agree with his choices and interpretation of the script?

Casting & Acting

Were the performances authentic and inspired? How did you feel when you left the theatre?

Technical Design

Describe the lighting, sound, set prop and costume elements of the production. Did anything stand out as technically difficult to achieve?

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you like to read reviews of films and books before you see or read them? Do you value the opinion of others when making decisions about what media to consume?
2. Who do you think is best equipped to write a critical review of a piece of theatre? Do you need to be a theatre artist? Or is it just as relevant to consider the opinion of the "person on the street"?
3. Don't forget to send The Huntington a copy! You can email it to education@huntingtontheatre.org.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

American Prison: A Reporter's Undercover Journey in the Business of Punishment. Bauer, Shane. Penguin Books, 2019.

Bludso's BBQ Cookbook: A Family Affair in Smoke & Soul. Bludso, Kevin and Noah Galuten, et al. Ten Speed Press, 2022.

The Big Book of HR. Mitchell, Barbara and Cornelia Gamlem. Career Press, Anniversary Edition, 2022.

The Empath Experience: What to do When You Feel Everything. Campos, Sydney. Adams Media, 2018

Hamlet. Shakespeare, William. Sea Wolf Pres Illustrated Classic, 2022.

The History and Politics of Public Radio. Bennett, James T. Springer, 2021.

Jacob & Esau: Jewish European History Between Nation and Empire. Hacoen, Malachi Haim. Cambridge University Press, 2019.

North by Shakespeare: A Rogue Scholar's Quest for the Truth behind the Bard's work. Blanding, Michael. Hachette Books, 2021.

United States Navy Boat Camp: The Complete Survival Guide for the Worst Eight Weeks of Your Life! Rockwood, Malcolm E. Create Space Publishing, 2014.



Prison. Photo provided by Pexels.



BBQ chef. Photo provided by Pexels.



Navy boat. Photo provided by Pexels.

THE HUNTINGTON CONNECTS

23/24 STUDENT MATINEE SEASON

FAT HAM October 5, 20, and 26, 2023

THE BAND'S VISIT December 8, 2023

THE HEART SELLERS December 21, 2023

STAND UP IF YOU'RE HERE TONIGHT
February 1, 2024

JOHN PROCTOR IS THE VILLAIN
February 29 and March 8, 2024

TONI STONE May 30, 2024

[HUNTINGTONTHEATRE.ORG/EDUCATION](https://www.huntingtontheatre.org/education)

CONNECT WITH US ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR
EXCLUSIVE BEHIND-THE-SCENES CONTENT

 @huntingtontheatre

 @huntingtontheatre

 @huntington

 @huntingtontheatre