

**Spotlight
on
Learning**
a Pioneer Theatre Company
Classroom Companion

**World Premiere
“Find and Sign”**



Pioneer Theatre Company's *Student Matinee Program* is made possible, in part, through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts and Parks Program, Salt Lake City Arts Council/Arts Learning Program, The Simmons Family



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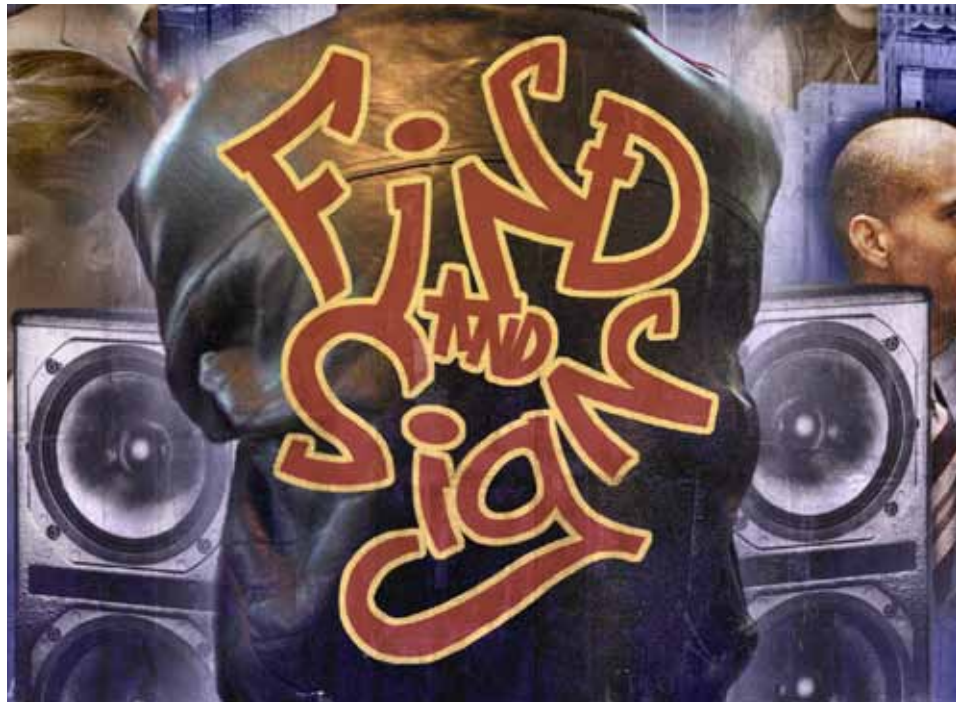
George Q. Morris Foundation

Approx. running time:

2 hours and 25 minutes, including one fifteen-minute intermission.

Student Talk-Back:

There will be a Student Talk-Back directly after the performance.



FIND AND SIGN • January 13 - January 28, 2012

By Wendy MacLeod

Q & A with the Playwright

by Dramaturg Elizabeth Williamson

Dramaturg Elizabeth Williamson talks with Wendy MacLeod about the world premiere of Find and Sign.



Playwright Wendy MacLeod

Q. What was your starting point for writing this play?

A. When I was living in England a few years ago I had the chance to see *Othello* at the Donmar Warehouse, with Ewan McGregor as Iago and Chiwetel Ejiofor as Othello. The mystery that lingered after I saw the play grew out of the scenes between Iago and Emilia. How did they come to be together?

Why does this moral woman agree to betray her friend? I was interested in foregrounding a woman character, one that is peripheral in Shakespeare's *Othello*, and in exploring race and romantic love in a contemporary context.

Q. There are a number of moments in the play highlighting perceptions of race and racism. What aspects of contemporary society are you investigating, and where did these questions come from?

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A. I was interested in exploring the subtler permutations of racism. How do we inadvertently make assumptions based on cultural stereotypes? Are there things white people say to each other that they wouldn't say if an African-American person was in the room? I was struck by an NPR piece about an advertising agency that was targeting an African-American market, and considering setting an ad at a swimming pool, when someone in the all-white room asked: "Do black people swim?" It's shocking, it's painful, yet it's all too believable that someone would say such a thing. In the play, there is a pivotal moment where a white record executive dangles Lakers tickets in front of a young black man without knowing whether or not this particular guy even liked basketball.

Q. Why set this play in the New York hip-hop music industry?

A. I was inspired by Jonathan Kozol's books. In *Savage Inequalities* he writes about the inequities of our public school system, about the disparities between schools in the Bronx and schools five miles away in Westchester.

Disadvantaged kids dream of getting out through a long shot--the basketball scholarship, the record deal--because that's what they see celebrated on TV and in the magazines. They would stand a better chance of improving their lives if they stayed in school but their schools are not always happy places, and many of these schools aren't able to adequately prepare their students for college. How can the system be fair when school budgets are tied to property taxes?

As Jonathan Kozol writes, "An awful lot of people come to college with this strange idea that there's no longer

segregation in America's schools, that our schools are basically equal; neither of these things is true."

I teach at Kenyon College, and often wonder: how does somebody get here if they're not from here? Middle-class families assume their children will go to college, send them to schools that prepare them for college, and know how to negotiate the admissions process. They're willing to trust that their child can major in English literature and still end up with a job. What happens to the equally bright kids who can't afford to take that kind of risk?

Biography of the Playwright

Wendy MacLeod's play *The House of Yes* became an award-winning Miramax film starring Parker Posey, and was produced by many theaters including The Magic Theater, Soho Rep, The Washington Shakespeare Company, The Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin, and The Gate Theater in London. Her other works for the stage include *Sin and Schoolgirl Figure*, both of which premiered at The Goodman, *Juvenilia* and *The Water Children*, both of which premiered at Playwrights Horizons, and *Things Being What They Are*,



Cast of *Find and Sign*. Photo by Alexander Weisman.

which premiered at Seattle Repertory Theatre and had an extended run at Steppenwolf in Chicago. Her new play *FIND AND SIGN* premieres at Pioneer Theater Company in Salt Lake City. Her prose has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Salon*, *POETRY* magazine and on *All Things Considered*.

A graduate of the Yale School of Drama, she is the James E. Michael Playwright-in-Residence at Kenyon College.

Synopsis

Julia is pretty, smart, funny and a dedicated public high school teacher in the Bronx. She is trying to get Mac, one of her brightest students, into Columbia. Iago is an on-the-rise and on-the-make music executive on the lookout for young hip-hop artists, along with his boss Andre and colleague, Cal. Mona, Julia's glamorous friend, completes the cast.

Julia and Iago meet at a party and begin somewhat cautiously to date, but the road to love is mined with dangers as they consider the price of emotional commitment, their pursuit of career goals, and the perils and pitfalls of dating in modern-day New York.

There is a considerable amount of conversational strong language in the play.

Several of the characters take drinks, and several may smoke, in several scenes.

The Hip-Hop Culture



Hip-Hop Culture from *Cultural Collision and Collusion: reflections on hip-hop culture, values, and schools*. Floyd D. Beachum and Carlos R. McCray. pp114.

Hip-hop culture has captured the hearts and minds of large numbers of today's youth. This influence has the potential to be positive or negative, but there has been a steady concern with regard to the more negative aspects. These include an over emphasis on material gain, extreme violence in lyrics, the encouragement of misogynistic behaviors, glamorization of selling drugs and prison culture, and the promotion of aggressive and/or antisocial behaviors (Beachum & McCray, 2008; Dyson, 1997; 2007; Gause, 2005b; Kunjufu, 1993; West, 2008). In the past, youth, especially Black youth, looked to their families, churches, and schools in order to develop and cultivate their values (Guy, 2004; Kunjufu, 1993). "Today, more and more Black youth are turning to rap music, music videos, designer clothing, popular Black films, and television programs for values and identity" (Kitwana, 2002, p.9). "The ages between 13-17 are when they [teenagers] are particularly vulnerable to outside influence and before their values and ideas are fully developed" (Kunjufu, 1993, p81). Therefore, Black youth are especially vulnerable to influences during their critical teenage years and at the same time they can be bombarded with messages and images from different outlets (i.e., music, videos, Internet, magazines). It is imperative for concerned adults to delve deeper into the worlds of youth, including hip-hop culture. Ginwright (2004) asserted, "Hip-hop culture is central to conceptualizing black youth identity because it is an essential pathway to understanding their struggles, realities and possibilities" (p.34).

Othello

Othello, in full *Othello, the Moor of Venice*, is a tragedy in five acts by William Shakespeare, written in 1603–04 and published in 1622 in a quarto edition from a transcript of an authorial manuscript. The play is set in motion when Othello, a heroic black general in the service of Venice, appoints Cassio and not Iago as his chief lieutenant. Jealous of Othello's success and envious of Cassio, Iago plots Othello's downfall by falsely implicating Othello's wife, Desdemona, and Cassio in a love affair. With the unwitting aid of Emilia, his wife, and the willing help of Roderigo, a fellow malcontent, Iago carries out his plan. Making use of a handkerchief belonging to Desdemona and found by Emilia when Othello has unwittingly dropped it, Iago persuades Othello that Desdemona has given the handkerchief to Cassio as a love token. Iago also induces Othello to eavesdrop on a conversation between himself and Cassio that is in fact about Cassio's mistress, Bianca, but which Othello is led to believe concerns Cassio's infatuation with Desdemona. These slender "proofs" confirm what Othello has been all too inclined to believe—that, as an older black man, he is no longer attractive to his young white Venetian wife. Overcome with jealousy, Othello kills Desdemona. When he learns from Emilia, too late, that his wife is blameless, he asks to be remembered as one who "loved not wisely but too well" and kills himself.

Post Show Discussion

- What similarities do you see between *Othello* and *Find and Sign*? Compare and contrast the stories. Do you think events like those portrayed in *Othello* will follow the conclusion of *Find and Sign*?
- What do you think of the issues of racism raised in the play? As the playwright asks in the Q&A, how do we inadvertently make assumptions based on cultural stereotypes? Are there things white people say to each other that they wouldn't say if an African-American person was in the room? Vice-versa?
- What do you think of Mac's decision? If you were given the same choice how would you decide?
- How does popular culture (including hip-hop) influence you in your life? What might be "good" influences? What might be "bad"?

Study Guide compiled by Ruth Ann Weisman.

College Admissions: Ivy league schools

The following table lists the eight U.S. universities that comprise the 'Ivy League' – a small group of private universities that enjoy a reputation for providing excellent education, and attract top students. It is interesting to note that the term 'ivy league' originally referred not to academics but to sports. The original Ivy League brought together not minds, but football teams. That said, these eight universities have some educational and institutional traits in common beyond their athletics programs. All are long-established, private universities; all are in the Northeastern U.S.; all benefit from sizeable endowments and

generous alumni financial support; all are highly selective – and all provide “need-blind” aid that often make them less expensive than in-state public colleges. Is an Ivy League school right for you? If so, which one? That’s a question only you will be able to answer. Factors to consider are the differences among Ivy League members (some are located in large cities, and some in small towns; some have religious affiliations, and some do not). A more important factor is what you want to get out of your college education. Although Ivy League schools generally deserve their good reputations, some of their programs are stronger than others.

School	Acceptance Rate	Early Action or Decision	Early Acceptance Rate	Top 10% of the High School Class	SAT (25/75 percentile)
Brown	9%	Decision	20%	93%	2000-2300
Columbia	7%	Decision	20%	97%	2100-2330
Cornell	18%	Decision	35%	89%	1280 - 1450j
Dartmouth	10%	Decision	25%	90%	2040-2360
Harvard	6%	Action	N/A*	95%	2080-2370
Penn	12%	Decision	26%	96%	2060-2330
Princeton	8%	Action	N/A*	99%	2100-2370
Yale	7%	Action	14%	97%	2120-2390

Figures are for the Fall 2011 entering class.

* Harvard and Princeton reinstated their early admissions programs in February 2011 after dropping them following the 2006-2007 application season.

OUR EQUITY CAST



CHARLES MOREY (Director) has been Artistic Director of Pioneer Theatre Company since 1984. He has directed over eighty productions for PTC including, in recent years, the world premieres of Bess Wohl’s *In and Touch(ed)*.

Keith Hamilton Cobb

KEITH HAMILTON COBB* (Andre) makes his PTC debut. TV/Film credits: *All My Children*, Gene Rodenberry’s *Andromeda*, *The Young and the Restless*, *Noah’s Arc*, *CSI: Miami*, *Suddenly Susan*, *Boston Common*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Eyes Beyond Seeing*. His other theatre credits include *Othello* (New Jersey Shakespeare Festival), *Hamlet* (North Shore Music Theatre), and *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet* (The Shakespeare Theatre), and others.



Karl Miller

KARL MILLER* (Iago) makes his PTC debut. New York: *Completeness* (Playwrights Horizons), *columbinus* (New York Theatre Workshop), and others. He won the Helen Hayes Award, Outstanding Lead Actor for *Angels in America, Part I*. He trained at Wittenberg University and remains a resident company member with Rorschach Theatre in Washington, D.C.



Gardner Reed

GARDNER REED* (Mona) makes her PTC debut. Previous credits include *The Women in The 39 Steps* (Portland Stage Company), and Jackie-O in Wendy MacLeod’s *The House of Yes* (Red Envelope Productions) and others.

DANIEL MORGAN SHELLEY* (Cal) makes his PTC debut. He was last seen as Designing Man in *The Man Who Ate Michael Rockefeller*. TV: *Law & Order*.

TERRELL DONNELL SLEDGE* (Mac) makes his PTC debut. New York: *Naked Angels Reading Series* as Mac in *Find and Sign*. Regional Theaters: Trinity Rep Co.: Giles Corey/Mercy Lewis, *The Crucible*; Commonwealth Shakespeare Company: *Othello*, among others.

MOLLY WARD* (Julia) makes her PTC debut. New York theater credits: *The Tenant* (Woodshed Collective); *Kin* (Playwrights Horizons); *Keep Your Baggage With You* (Theater for the New City); Nick Jones’ *Nosemaker’s Apprentice* (Brick Theater); Crystal Skillman’s *Nobody* (RPR); *End of Lines* and *The Shape of Metal* (59E59 Theaters). Upcoming TV: *Are We There Yet?*



Daniel Morgan Shelley



Terrell Donnell Sledge



Molly Ward