

***I See You*, by Mongiwekhaya**

Education Pack

THEMES:

RACISM
MULTILINGUALISM
GENERATIONAL CONFLICTS

GENRE: Realism (with an aura of Psychedelic Noir).

AGE RESTRICTION: 14+ (depicting physical violence and use of strong language)

NUMBER OF CHARACTERS: 8 characters (5M, 3F)

CHARACTER LIST:

SOMANDLA 'BEN' MTHOMBENI — 19 years old, Born in South Africa, raised in America, currently in second year of studies at Wits University. (M)

YVETTE 'SKINN' SKINNER — 17 years old, but tells everyone she is 18. A totally Zef Afrikaner girl, Skinn recently left her boyfriend JAMES and is in need of a place to stay. (F)

MELISIZWE BUTHELEZI — 55 years old, ex-MK soldier, currently a sergeant of the South African police department. Currently going through a messy divorce and unable to move on. (M)

ZULU MASINGA — 30 years old. Masinga is more interested in what he can gain financially. (M)

JAMES — 27 years old. He is recently dumped by Skinn, which does not sit well with him. (M)

SIPHOKAZI “S’POGI” SHABANGU — 57 years old. Ex-MK soldier turned cop who expects to move up in the police ranks and is highly aware of the media focus on cops. (M)

DJ MAVOVO — 32 years old. Radio DJ of the Power and the Glory. (F)

DR. PRAVESH — Works at the ‘Chris Hani Baragwanath’ Hospital in Johannesburg. (F)

SYNOPSIS:

In post-apartheid Johannesburg, South Africa, Buthelezi, struggling with a messy divorce, prepares for a busy night shift as a police officer. Meanwhile, Ben, a young student who doesn’t know his own history meets Skinn and they hit it off. Buthelezi encounters Ben on his shift and arrests him. Skinn is left to deal with her ex-boyfriend, James, who can’t let their relationship go. As the night progresses, Ben and Bethelzi help each other figure out who they really are and how to find their voice in their own language.

The play is based on a real encounter.

I See You was presented at the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs - Royal Court as part of International Playwrights: A Genesis Foundation Project. It was developed during the Royal Court’s new writing project in South Africa which began in 2013. The project was supported by the British Council and Connect ZA. Noma Dumezweni made her directorial debut and after its run in the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, *I See You* played at the Market Theatre Johannesburg.

This play was originally written in English, with inserts of Afrikaans, Zulu and Xhosa. The title was translated in all those languages as well – *I SEE YOU* (English) *NGIYAKUBONA* (Zulu) *EK SIEN JOU* (Afrikaans) *NDIYAKUBONA* (Xhosa).

KEY MOMENTS:

Scene 6 (3M)

Dialogue: Buthelezi takes Ben to an abandoned parking lot in order to break him into conceding to give out his blood for testing, which brings up old resentments and conflicting identities. (pp. 44-52)

Scene 10 (2M)

Buthelezi asks Ben to feel the scar on his chest and tells him the story behind it. (pp. 74,75)

Scene 12 (3M, 1F)

Ben is finally taken to have his blood tested. Buthelezi and Masinga are surprised by Ben's reaction at the Doctor's office but Buthelezi manages to regain control of their prisoner. (pp. 85-89)

STEP ONE: ASK

What questions come to the students' minds when they read these key moments? In groups, ask them to come up with questions based on the play which have no easy answers. Think about the universal themes raised above and try to combine more than one concept in each question. Here are some examples:

- Apartheid has been one of the most gruesome segregations in history. How does it affect post-colonial societies today?
- What is colorism? Who gets to say who can identify themselves as belonging to a race/ethnic group?
- Do you live in or do you know multilingual households? How is growing up with multiple languages a way of strengthening or causing diffusion of an ethnic identity?

Consider these questions across racism and race perceptions in post-apartheid societies; acquired languages and mother tongue in multilingual communities; generational conflicts and belonging to a collective identity, and explore if students can relate to the issues portrayed in this text.

STEP TWO: EXPLORE

Exercise 1:

As the play explores identity in a multilingual/multicultural post-colonial society in depth, this could be a good exercise to open the discussions:

The truth about me – Give each student a small piece of painter’s tape or a post-it note. To start, each person must stand at a specific spot in the circle. Ask the students to take the tape or post-it note and place it between their feet. The facilitator stands in the middle of the circle.

Explain: As you notice I do not have a spot. The objective of the game will be for me to take one of your spots. How I will do that is by saying something that is true for me. I will say “My name is _____, and the truth about me is _____.” If that is also true for you, you will move and find a new spot in the circle (like musical chairs). Then the person that no longer has a spot will move to the middle and share a truth. The goal of the game is to get multiple people to move, so you should share a fact with that in mind.

Before you begin, it is paramount you ask the group - how might we play safely? Any other rules they think they should add to the game to help them stay committed to their community contract? You can then play multiple rounds.

At the end, gather in a standing circle to reflect. How did this game make you feel? What did you notice about the group? What were statements that made a lot of people move? What were statements that made only a few people move? What was it like to be in the middle of the circle?

Exercise 2:

At scene 6, Bethelzi forces Ben to remember his mother tongue, his own language, and as he tells the tale of his experiences as a freedom fighter, he brings up several languages, including Portuguese and Spanish (p. 50). This really reinforces the idea of multiple languages building up the cultural and ethnic identity of the characters. A good exercise to get students to experience this could be:

Speaking Gibberish –

Ask two students to take the stage. One will speak gibberish, and the other will translate the gibberish into English. Give the gibberish student a specific situation to

talk about, or take suggestions from the class. (Perhaps take the scenario proposed in the play itself, a police deposition/enquiry.) The gibberish speaker should speak only one line at a time, using as much physicality as they can. Then the interpreter will mimic the motions and translate the phrase into English.

Encourage the gibberish speaker to be very specific in their intention and actions. Encourage the interpreter to think very carefully about trying to make the gibberish make sense. Make sure the gibberish speaker repeats the same line if he feels he is being “mistranslated”. Allow participants to really explore non-verbal forms of communication and understand the struggle of speaking a language which can alienate them from their environment.

Exercise 3:

At the final scene 13 (pp. 90-96), we see Ben confront Bethlezi and what he calls the darkness behind the skin and the name, culminating at his reunion with Skinn where they both reveal their true name to each other. With that in mind, and knowing that music and rhythm play an integral part in the development of this play, an exercise that can be used to explore that is -

Name Dance - The goal of this activity is for each player to create a dance piece that uses their entire body to spell out their name.

Start out by giving an example of a dance piece using your name - there needs to be a moment where students can observe what they are expected to achieve with this, even if not necessarily the facilitator doing a name-dance themselves.

Give the class 2 minutes to practice their dance pieces individually. For a more cohesive structure and to maximise time with larger groups, perhaps ask them to go from three frozen images which represent their own names, into a dance which interlinks all three.

Have each student present their dance piece to the class. What did they find out about their names in their own dance?

STEP THREE: FEEDBACK

Discuss what came up for the students. Can they relate with the characters' plight? What was the most interesting thing they learned? Bring students to return to the text and analyse what they are taking away from the exercises for their character study- if they have been assigned their characters already. Once the text is read in its entirety, perhaps pose the further questions:

- Why when faced by the darkness, Ben says I love you to Bethelzi? Was that a strategy to confuse him or was Ben actually coming into a realisation – that he is part of something bigger than himself?

- What is in a name? Do you know the story behind your name? Why does your name represent you? What name do you most like to be called? What name do you dislike the most? Allow students to really dig deep for the answers.