PLAY GUIDE

THE CURTAIN RISES

THE ROYALE

BY MARCO RAMIREZ

BROTHER SISTER RHYTHM PRIDE
FOCUS BREATHE IT AIN'T ABOUT
GRACE ABOUT

ARIZONA THEATRE COMPANY

2019  2020

THE CURTAIN RISES
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*The Royale* Play Guide by Megan Sutton, Education Associate. For questions about the guide, please contact msutton@arizonatheatre.org

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### Support for Arizona Theatre Company’s Learning & Education Programming

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Want to be a sponsor of ATC’s Learning & Education programming? Contact our Chief Development Officer, Julia Waterfall-Kanter, at jwkanter@arizonatheatre.org
The mission of Arizona Theatre Company is to inspire, engage, and entertain – one moment, one production, and one audience at a time.

Under new leadership – and now celebrating its 53rd-season – Arizona Theatre Company is truly “The State Theatre.” Our company boasts the largest subscriber base of any performing arts organization in Arizona, with more than 130,000 people each year attending performances at the historic Temple of Music and Art in Tucson, and the elegant Herberger Theater Center in downtown Phoenix.

Each season of carefully selected productions reflects the rich variety of world drama – from classic to contemporary plays, from musicals to new works – as audiences enjoy a rich emotional experience that can only be captured through live theatre. ATC is the preeminent professional theatre in the state of Arizona. Under the direction of Artistic Director Sean Daniels in partnership with Managing Director Billy Russo, ATC operates in two cities – unlike any other League of Resident Theaters (LORT) company in the country.

ATC shares the passion of the theatre through a wide array of outreach programs, educational opportunities, access initiatives, and community events. Through the schools and summer programs, ATC focuses on teaching Arizona’s youth about literacy, cultural development, performing arts, specialty techniques used onstage, and opens their minds to the creative power of dramatic literature. With approximately 450 Learning & Education activities annually, ATC reaches far beyond the metropolitan areas of Tucson and Phoenix, enriching the theatre learning experience for current and future audiences.

The Temple of Music and Art: The home of ATC productions in downtown Tucson

The Herberger Theater Center: The home of ATC productions in downtown Phoenix
INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

THE ROYALE

By MARCO RAMIREZ
Directed by MICHAEL JOHN GARCÉS

Winner of two Obie Awards, an Outer Critics Circle Award, and a Drama Desk Award, and multiple other awards and sold out houses in London, New York and LA. The Royale is not your usual sports play. First of all, it is not really about life in the ring. Second, not a single punch will be thrown, at least not with fists. The play is a deeply theatrical and emotionally moving piece about the life of the outsider in American culture. Set in 1910, deep in the midst of Jim Crow, the story is loosely based on the life of Jack Johnson, the world’s first African-American heavyweight boxing champion. The play explores one man’s struggle while reflecting a much broader one. It is also a play about a brother and his sister - his sister, who as he climbs for glory and respect, remains his greatest adversary and strongest motivation.

"Original and graceful. The Royale packs a punch!" - The New York Times

The Company of ATC’s The Royale. Photo credit Tim Fuller.
CAST AND CREATIVE

CAST

Bechir Sylvain*  
Edwin Lee Gibson*  
Erica Chamblee*  
Roberto Antonio Martin*  
Peter Howard*

Jay  
Wynton  
Nina  
Fish  
Max

CREATIVE

Michael John Garcés^  
Dom Ruggiero*  
Misha Kachman♦  
Sarita Fellows♦  
Allen Willner  
Brian Jerome Peterson  
Judy Bowman, CSA  
Michael Gutierrez

Director  
Stage Manager  
Scenic Designer  
Costume Designer  
Lighting Designer  
Sound Designer  
Casting Director  
Boxing Consultant

*Denotes members of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.  
^Denotes members of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society.  
♦Denotes members of United Scenic Artists, Local 829.

Denotes artists included in ATC’s Arizona Artists Initiative.

ARIZONA ARTISTS INITIATIVE is a new initiative that furthers ATC’s commitment to our community and the artists who live in Arizona, were born in Arizona, return or move to Arizona, or write about Arizona. As the Official State Theatre of Arizona, we celebrate the impact Arizona has on the arts.
BEHIND THE SCENES

A look at The Royale at Arizona Theatre Company

Scenic Design

Model of the set used by our technical director, Nils Emerson (pictured).

Scenic design by Misha Kachman

Costume Design

 Renderings by Costume Designer, Sarita Fellows
Marco Ramirez’s love of theatre started when he saw a student matinee of *Of Mice and Men* at GableStage. This was his first experience with a true straightforward play. The realism and intimacy of it all stuck with him. He attended New York University and won multiple awards for various plays he had written. He then moved on to the prestigious playwriting program at The Julliard School in New York. Ramirez has been a writer for many well-known television shows such as *Sons of Anarchy*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Fear the Walking Dead*, Marvel’s *Daredevil* and the upcoming Netflix series *The Defenders*. His play *The Royale*, has earned him many prestigious nominations and awards (John Gassner Award for Best Play from the Outer Critics Circle, two Drama League award nominations, and Outstanding Play from the Drama Desk Awards). Fun fact: Ramirez had the opportunity to see his show, *The Royale*, produced at the very theatre where his dream began – GableStage.

**Playwright Interview About The Royale***:


* “2016 Spring : A Conversation with Broadway Playwright Marco Ramirez.” Thirsty
Set somewhere in 1905-1910, *The Royale* deals with segregation and family dynamics through the lens of sports. The story is based loosely on African-American boxing legend, Jack Johnson.

**Segregation in America**

Once slave trade was abolished under the thirteenth amendment, people didn’t know what to do with former slaves. Coexisting as equals wasn’t an option in their minds so segregation started to take place. It got worse when it started to become official under the “black codes”. These were laws that mandated almost all aspects of black peoples’ lives. These laws then became official and were called “Jim Crow Laws” based off of an offensive term for black people. Everything became separate: housing, land, schooling, drinking fountains, you name it. The Supreme Court overturned a civil rights bill that attempted to outlaw segregation determining that it was constitutional under the idea of “separate but equal”. These laws made it very hard for black people to live and function, let alone travel. In 1936, an African-American man named Victor Hugo Green made a guide for people like him that made travel possible. It was called “The Negro Motorist Green-Book” and it was only the first of many editions.
Segregation in Sports in America

The world of sports was no exception when it came to segregation. For example, baseball had completely separate leagues for people of color (comprised of mostly African-American people, but also some Latin-Americans). Basketball stayed segregated until 1950 when they finally became fully integrated. In football segregation was taking place early in the 1900s, but wasn’t officially segregated until 1934 and remained that way until 1945. Horse racing was almost completely dominated by black jockeys around the time the Kentucky Derby started. In fact, the first black athlete to become a millionaire was Isaac Murphy – a three-time Kentucky Derby winner. Another black Jockey, Jimmy Winkfield, won the Kentucky Derby twice. However, when the Jim Crow Laws came to fruition, a sport once dominated by black people became suddenly devoid of diversity. The effects of segregation in sports is still something that has to be fought against today, this is also true for our society outside of athletics.
**Jack Johnson**

Jack Johnson was the first African-American to become the World Heavyweight Champion. He was one of nine children born to former slave parents. He was born in 1878 and worked as a laborer in order to help support his large family. Johnson started to get into boxing and won small fights with minor purses. It didn’t take Johnson long to gain a reputation, in fact, he earned himself the nickname “Galveston Giant”. Johnson set his eyes on winning the champion title, which at that time was held by white boxer Jim F. Jeffries. However, Jeffries refused to fight Johnson because of the color of his skin. Even so, later on in 1908 Johnson won the title of Heavyweight Champion against Tommy Burns (Burns held the title after Jeffries). Because a black man held this prestigious title, fans put out a plea for a “Great White Hope” to dethrone Johnson. Jim F. Jeffries came out of retirement to respond to the call and agreed to fight Jack at long last. 15 rounds in, Johnson won and Jeffries was humbled. Johnson held the heavyweight title until 1915.

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**HISTORICAL CONTEXT SOURCES:**


Secondary Classroom Guide

Discussion Questions

1. What does each character want? How do they get what they want?
2. What is the overall theme of the play?
3. What does this play teach us about our history?
4. What makes a champion tick?
5. If you were in Jay’s shoes, would you win the fight, or intentionally lose?
6. Was Nina right to come to Jay before his fight? Why/why not?

Bechir Sylvain and Erica Chamblee in rehearsals for ATC’s The Royale. Photo credit Tim Fuller.
**Soundscape Activity:**
Sound plays a huge role in this show. Do this activity both to demonstrate how to create environments with pure sound, and as a gateway to discussing sound in *The Royale*.

**Materials:** None

**Instructions:**
1. Have students sit in a large circle with their backs toward the center. Then, choose a location (beach, office, park, kitchen, café, etc).
2. One at a time, have them create a sound in that environment (air conditioner, computer monitor, ocean, wind, etc). By the end everyone should be making a sound. Lastly, have the students close their eyes and listen.

This can be followed by a discussion of the sound in *The Royale*, here are some ideas to get the conversation started:
- Did you like that the actors made all the sounds? Why?
- Was this the most effective way to tell the story?
- Why do you think the playwright chose to do it this way?

**This activity fulfills the following standards:**
Arizona Academic Standards in the Arts (Theatre):
- **TH.CR.3.HS1b** Justify technical design choices to support the story and emotional impact of a devised or scripted theatrical work. (e.g. lighting, sound, scenery, props, costumes, makeup, media).
- **TH.RE.7.HS1a** Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a theatrical work to develop criteria for artistic choices.
- **TH.RE.8.HS1c** Justify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in and observation of a theatrical work.

Bechir Sylvain, Roberto Antonio Martin, and Edwin Lee Gibson in rehearsals for ATC’s *The Royale*. Photo credit Tim Fuller.
Movement Activity:
Movement is utilized alongside sound to portray the fights. Do this activity both to demonstrate how to use movement to create an image in the audiences’ mind’s eye, and as a gateway to discussing movement in The Royale.

Materials: None

Instructions:
1. Have students sit or stand in a large circle. Tell them that there is a magic box in the center of the circle.
2. Demonstrate the activity by opening the box, paying special attention to the dimensions and details of that box, and pulling an item out. Use your movement and hand motions to explore the object and invite students to guess what you pulled out of the box.
3. Next, have the students come up one by one and pull something new out of the box (it can be anything). Have the class guess and repeat until every student has gone.

This can be followed by a discussion of the movement in The Royale, here are some ideas to get the conversation started:

- Were you able to visualize the fights as if they were actually happening? Why?
- Would it be more impactful, do you think, if the actors did stage combat (where they rehearse the fight to look real without actually hurting each other)?
- Why did the playwright chose this method to present the boxing matches? Was it effective? Why or why not?

This activity fulfills the following standards:
TH.RE.7.HS1a Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a theatrical work to develop criteria for artistic choices.
TH.RE.8.HS1c Justify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in and observation of a theatrical work.
TH.RE.9.HS3b Analyze and evaluate varied aesthetic interpretations of production elements for a theatrical work.

Director Michael John Garcés, Roberto Antonio Martin, and Edwin Lee Gibson in rehearsals for ATC’s The Royale. Photo credit Tim Fuller.
**Reading/Theatre/History – Arts Integration Lesson:**
Use this lesson to explore the character of Jay Jackson with his historical counterpart, Jack Johnson.

**Materials:** Large paper, regular paper, markers

**Instructions:**
1. As a class, have the students read aloud the following article (or selections of the article depending on time) about Jack Johnson:
   https://www.biography.com/athlete/jack-johnson
2. Have students group up and, on a large piece of paper, have them make a compare/contrast chart with Jay Jackson on one side and Jack Johnson on the other.
3. Have each group share/explain their chart with the class.
4. As individuals, have them create a list of ways they relate to either Jay or Jack and the lives they led.

**Post activity discussion questions:**
- Is *The Royale* about Jack Johnson? Are you sure?
- Why would the playwright change the name of the historical figure?
- Is it important to distinguish that this story is or isn’t exactly about Jack Johnson?

Close out the activity with this quote from Marco Ramirez, the playwright:

> “I never set out to tell Jack Johnson’s story, or even to write a story about race relations. At first, all I wanted was to write a play about boxing. I love the simplicity of it. The bare-bones nature of it. It’s an inherently dramatic sport, and very theatrical. Two go in, one comes out. They have nothing more than their physical and emotional selves in that ring, and I love that. I mulled over what kind of boxing story I wanted to tell for a while - with Jack Johnson’s story being the most obvious elephant in the room for a while. At first, I thought I’d go in a different direction, because another play (*The Great White Hope*) had already told Jack’s story. But eventually, I realized I could tell my own version of the story. I could take liberties, change names, and change events to suit my purposes as a “dramatist” - to make the story as compelling in shape and scope as I wanted it to be.”

**This activity fulfills the following standards:**
Arizona’s English Language Arts Standards (Reading):
- 9-10.RL.9 Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work.

Arizona Academic Standards in the Arts (Theatre):
- TH.RE.9.HS1a Examine a theatrical work using supporting evidence and criteria, while considering art forms, history, culture, and other disciplines.

Arizona’s History and Social Science Standards (History):
- HS.SP.1.3 Evaluate the significance of past events as they relate to their own lives and the world.
The Royale

PLAY ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

**PROTAGONIST**
How is this story about them?

**ANTAGONIST**
In what ways does this character work against the Protagonist?

**THEME OF THE PLAY**
What was the main idea/theme of the play?

What does it say about the time in which it was set?

Meaning of the Title – why this title, what does it mean/represent? Often an idea is expressed through a feeling – what lies beneath the feeling?

**MOOD OF THE PLAY**
How does the mood start and how does it change throughout the show?

**PERSONAL REACTION**
What is your main take away? What did you like? What didn’t you like?

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**CHARACTER LIST:**

- **JAY** - The Heavyweight Champion.
- **WYNTON** - His trainer.
- **NINA** - His fierce big sister.
- **FISH** - An amateur boxer.
- **MAX** - A fight promoter and referee.