



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

CHRISTEL DEHAAN
STUDENT MATINEE PROGRAM

at the Indiana Repertory Theatre

STUDY GUIDE



PURPOSE

BY BRANDEN JACOBS-JENKINS
DIRECTED BY TYRONE PHILLIPS

JANUARY 26 – FEBRUARY 21

Original artwork by Jake Lebowitz.

OneAmerica[™]
Financial



Lilly Endowment Inc.
A Private Philanthropic Foundation



Access/VSA
International Network
A Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability Program
Program Site 2026

PURPOSE



Content Spotlight

Contains profanity and racially charged language, discussions of self-harm, sexuality, alcohol consumption on stage, references to Christian theology, and gunshots.

BENJAMIN HANNA
MARGOT LACY ECCLES
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

SUZANNE SWEENEY
MANAGING DIRECTOR

For more information, contact:

The Education Department
education@irtlive.com | 317.916.4841

140 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204 | irtlive.com



INDIANA
REPERTORY
THEATRE

STAFF

Anna E. Barnett
Education Manager

Devon Ginn
Director of Inclusion and Community Partnerships

Devan O'Mailia Mathias
Education Assistant

Claire Wilcher
Education Coordinator

DESIGN

Geneva Denney-Moore
Design and Communications Manager

prize-winning family drama

For decades, the influential Jasper family has been a pillar of Black America—movers and shakers in the Civil Rights movement, figureheads in the church, and power players in politics. When the Jaspers' son and an uninvited friend return home for a family celebration, secrets just under the surface threaten to crack and shake their foundations. Intense, hilarious, deeply dramatic, and filled with intrigue, *Purpose* is an epic family drama. Winner of the 2025 Pulitzer Prize and the Tony Award for Best Play.

Recommended for students in grades 9-12

The performance will last approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes including one 15-minute intermission

INSIDE

Planning Your Visit	1
Parking	2
Indiana Academic Standards	5
About the Playwright	6
Characters	6
Synopsis	7
Key Terms and Concepts	8
Important People	10
Resources	12
Discussion Questions	12

PLANNING YOUR VISIT



You, the audience, are one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show.

Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:

- Leave mobile phones, cameras, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home or turned off.
- You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text during the performance.
- The house lights dimming and going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.
- Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.
- Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.
- Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show, or during intermission.
- Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.
- Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.
- Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call; this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.

STUDENT MATINEE ARRIVAL & PARKING INFORMATION

ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

IRT is located one-half block west of Circle Centre Mall on Washington St., between north bound Illinois St. and southbound Capitol Ave.

- The physical address of IRT is 140 W. Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204.
- Buses should unload and load directly in front of the theatre. (Do not block the entrance to Embassy Suites garage.) Please plan to arrive 20-30 minutes before your performance is scheduled to begin.
- You will be greeted at the curb by an IRT Staff Member and directed to the correct entrance.
- For shows on the Janet Allen Stage, students and teachers will take the stairs to the 4th floor.
- The teacher named on the reservation should check in with the IRT Education staff member stationed in the lobby.
- Your group will be ushered to your assigned seats.
- Students and chaperones should follow instructions of all IRT Staff for your safety.

LATE ARRIVAL

If you believe that you are going to be late, please contact the IRT House Manager, Katy Thompson at 317.916.4803. Provide them with a phone number and the name of the school so that Education staff may be in contact with you.

- You can contact IRT Education (education@irtlive.com) with non-emergency information on the day of the show.

PARKING

- Buses may park for free at Victory Field unless they are having an event - we will inform you if that is the case. The House Manager will give you a parking pass for each bus when you arrive at the theatre. It should be displayed in the windshield.
- Continue east on Washington St. past the JW Marriott and turn left across Maryland St. into the Victory Field lot.
- **PLEASE NOTE that Victory Field no longer has public restroom spaces available. We apologize for any inconvenience.**
- For car, and van parking information, please visit irtlive.com for the most up to date information
- **While IRT will make every effort to communicate parking information in advance, it is the responsibility of schools and drivers to make alternate arrangements.**



INDIANA STATE STANDARDS

Seeing a performance of *Purpose* at Indiana Repertory Theatre is a great way to help make connections for students and facilitate their understanding of a text. Some key academic standards to consider on your trip can be found by scanning this QR Code:



ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins



Branden Jacobs-Jenkins is a Brooklyn-based playwright and producer and two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist. He received the 2024 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play for *Appropriate*, which recently completed an acclaimed, record-breaking, 8-month run on Broadway. Other recent theatre credits include *The Comeuppance* (Signature Theatre Company, NYC; Almeida Theatre, London); *Girls* (Yale Rep); *Everybody* (Signature Theatre); *War* (Yale Rep; Lincoln Center/LCT3); *Gloria* (Vineyard Theatre); *An Octoroon* (Obie Award; Soho Rep, Theatre for a New Audience); and *Neighbors* (The Public Theater). He currently teaches at Yale University and serves as Vice President of the Dramatists Guild council and on the boards of Soho Rep, Park Avenue Armory, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and the Dramatists Guild Foundation. Additional honors include a USA Artists fellowship, a Guggenheim fellowship, the MacArthur fellowship, the Windham-Campbell Prize for Drama, and the inaugural Tennessee Williams Award. He is currently writing the book for the upcoming stage adaptation of *Purple Rain*.

CHARACTERS

Meet the People in *Purpose*:

Solomon “Sonny” Jasper

A highly influential Black political figure. Marched with Martin Luther King, Jr and other prominent activists in the Civil Rights movement. Larger than life.

Claudine Jasper

Solomon’s wife. Beloved matriarch, ultimate hostess, and protector of the Jasper reputation.

Solomon “Junior” Jasper

The oldest son. A state senator who aspires to match his father’s level of public life. Just released from a two -year prison sentence due to white collar crimes. Still dreaming big.

Nazareth “Naz” Jasper Youngest son. Prefers the quiet of his wilderness photography career to the chaos of his family. A loner. Our narrator.

Morgan Jasper Junior’s wife. Does not want to keep up with being a “First Lady” of the family. About to serve a year-long prison sentence for connection with her husband’s crimes.

Aziza Houston Friend of Nazareth. Has made a deal with Naz and is giving him a ride to his family’s house for his brother’s homecoming celebration.

SYNOPSIS

Nazareth Jasper, the narrator of the play, tells the story of one particular day in the life of the Jasper family and the chaos left in its wake. Nazareth arrives at his family home after a long drive with his friend Aziza, who was giving him a ride as thanks for...a favor. Upon his arrival, he is met by his older brother, Solomon Jr, whose recent release from prison is reason for the family gathering.

One by one, the Jasper family emerges, and when Aziza meets Solomon, the patriarch, and discovers that Naz comes from a very famous Black family, she is starstruck. Claudine insists on hosting Naz’s friend (hoping beyond hope that he has finally brought home a romantic partner), and Aziza is easily convinced to stay the night due to the coming snowstorm.

As the evening unfolds, light is shed on the intersections of the Jasper family’s celebrated prominence and the inner workings that lie beneath. Secrets, betrayals, hopes, and identity are all served up on the perfectly set dinner table. As Nazareth navigates this slice of life with his family and good friend, he is asked to reckon with his sense of self, his place in the world, and the legacy we all leave...if we choose to do so.

(left to right) Tamara Tunie, ensemble member Jon Michael Hill, Ayanna Bria Bakari and Harry Lennix
credit: Michael Brosilow
Production photos for Steppenwolf Theatre’s production of *Purpose* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, directed by Phylicia Rashad.



KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

*“You don’t know what it was like the rest of the year – **Bama COs** always pulling sh*t just like you’re doing.”*

stands for Alabama Correctional Officers, or prison guards.

*“this diagnosis emerged during the course of the investigation against him: **Bipolar I**”*

a mental health condition characterized by extreme mood swings between manic and depressive episodes.

*“His sort of celebrity back in the day turned him into a kind of **itinerant preacher**, too busy with TV appearances and glad-handing dignitaries to dedicate himself to just one pulpit.”*

a preacher who travels from place to place to preach, rather than be a pastor of just one church.

*“So my mother turned her home – this home – into a, well, if not exactly a house of God, at least his **pied-à-terre**.”*

a home or dwelling kept for occasional use. In French, it means “foot on the ground.”

*“I dropped out of **divinity school** – his very prestigious alma mater – in my final semester, which quite obviously did not please him.”*

an educational institution that trains religious leaders/members of the clergy.

*“for certain people, he can be a kind of lightning rod, due to his views on specific Middle Eastern entanglements and, like, ‘**Black Capitalism**’”*

the concept of Black people strategically participating in the capitalist economy to build wealth and empower their communities.

*“You’re like a black **nepo-baby**! What are you so afraid of?”*

Short for “nepotism baby”, this refers to a person who benefits from a well-connected or famous relative (often a parent).

*“And every weekend he was watching you on whatever show that was you used to do where folks just sat around talking about stuff... ‘**The Roundtable**.’”*

a talk show program on NPR.

*“It was like an **Afro-centric** education”*

a worldview, a school of thought, and a methodology that places people of African descent at the center of history, culture, and experience.

*“One of those **Panther schools**”*

refers to a school run by the Black Panthers, a Black power political activist group founded during the Civil Rights Movement in 1966. A “Panther school” would have taught about class struggle and Black liberation as well as traditional academic curriculum.

*“Like a hippie sort of **HBCU** for children.”*

An acronym for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which are accredited institutions of higher education established before 1964 with the primary mission of educating Black Americans.

*“My father is not a **climate denier**.”*

a person who rejects the scientific consensus on climate change and the negative impacts of it.

*“And I have told you there is no such thing as ‘**asexual**’ or ‘non-sexual’ or whatever you’re trying to call it.”*

asexuality is a sexual orientation where a person experiences little to no sexual attraction to any gender.

*“I am ruined and none of you **hucksters** seem to have no sense of responsibility or remorse!”*

a person who uses aggressive or questionable methods to promote or sell something.

*“My mother had been the same age as the little girls who were murdered in the bombing of the **16th Street Baptist** in 1963.”*

refers to the racist bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama that killed three Black girls and was a major benchmark and catalyst of the Civil Rights Movement.

*“I had never seen Morgan so out of pocket, touching every **third rail** in sight – not the least of which involving an infamous video which appeared online many years prior to this evening.”*

technically, a third rail is an electrified rail that provides power to trains in subway systems. In the play, it’s used as a metaphor to describe an untouchable, highly controversial subject.

*“‘An agreement is going to be drafted which she will need to sign.’ ‘Like an **NDA**?’”*

an acronym for Non-Disclosure Agreement, a legal contract that prevents parties from sharing confidential information.

*“Morgan, be quiet! She is going to try to **subpoena** you to testify in something that you do not want to be involved in.”*

a written command ordering a person to attend a court.

*“I thought about the countless hordes of monks and nuns and **ascetics** – the **Desert Fathers** – to whom we owe so much of our knowledge and understanding of faith.”*

An ascetic is a person who practices extreme self-denial or self-mortification, leading a life of severe simplicity and abstaining from worldly pleasures. The Desert Fathers were early Christian monks who lived as hermits in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, starting in the 3rd and 4th centuries.

ON THE WALLS OF AZIZA'S CLASSROOM



Martin Luther King, Jr.
American Civil Rights activist



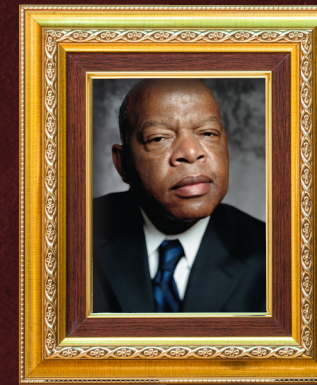
Rosa Parks
Civil Rights activist



Adam Clayton Powell
Activist, NYC Councilman,
and congressman



Madame CJ Walker
America's first female self-made millionaire



John Lewis
Civil Rights activist,
Georgia congressman



Jesse Owens
Gold medal track and field athlete



Erykah Badu
neo-soul singer/musician

*"It was like an Afro-centric education.
... And tacked up on the walls around
every room were like a million of these
posters of famous... Blacks, like you,
like all over the place."*



WEB DuBois
scholar and author, co-founder of the NAACP.



Harriet Tubman
noted conductor in the Underground
Railroad, spy for the Union army



Langston Hughes
poet, central figure of the Harlem Renaissance



Nelson Mandela
anti-apartheid activist and
former president of South Africa



George Washington Carver
agricultural scientist and inventor



Queen Nefertiti
Queen of the 18th dynasty
of Ancient Egypt



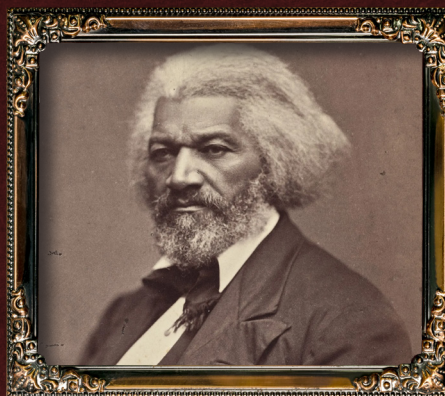
James Baldwin
writer and civil rights activist



Thurgood Marshall
Associate Justice of the
Supreme Court from 1967-1991



Gwendolyn Brooks
American poet and author



Frederick Douglass
abolitionist and orator, 19th century



Hannibal
Carthaginian general, 247-181 B.C.



Mae Jemison
first African American
woman in space



Zora Neale Hurston
American writer and anthropologist



Jesse Jackson
activist, politician, and minister

RESOURCES

Watch:

[Phylicia Rashad: The Grace and Purpose Behind a Legendary Career | Legacy Talk with Lena Waithe](#)

[Branden Jacobs-Jenkins on the inspiration for ‘Purpose,’ his Tony-winning family drama](#)

[Playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins on his Broadway hit “Purpose”](#)

[Branden Jacobs-Jenkins and Phylicia Rashad on Bringing PURPOSE to Broadway](#)

[Pulitzer Prize-Winning Playwright On His Hit Broadway Show “Purpose” | Amanpour and Company](#)

[Black History Spotlight: Civil Rights Trailblazers | PBS](#)

Listen:

[I Have a Dream, Martin Luther King Jr. : Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

Read:

[March on Washington Speech - SNCC Digital Gateway](#) SNCC Digital Gateway

[Remembering Their Father, Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)

My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr., by Coretta Scott King

Coretta: My Life, My Love, My Legacy, by Coretta Scott King

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Pre-show

- What do you know about the Civil Rights Movement? Do you have any knowledge of the personal lives of leaders of the movement? Why or why not?
- Do you have siblings? What is your relationship like with them?
- Do you plan to follow in the footsteps of any of your family members? Do you think that will change as you grow older?

Post-show

- Did you find yourself siding with any of the characters more than others? Why or why not?
- What images/characters/moments are still sticking with you after seeing the play?
- Do you think children owe their parents anything? Why or why not?
- Why do you think this play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama? What is special about it?