



**Lights Up! Library  
Classroom Activities**

***Poor Yella Rednecks*  
By Qui Nguyen  
Directed by May Adrales**



## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for bringing Manhattan Theatre Club's Lights Up! Library initiative into your high school classroom! We're thrilled to provide to you and your students these classroom activities and the performing recording of *Poor Yella Rednecks* by Qui Nguyen.

Our goals for this initiative are:

- To help students better understand themselves and the world through the medium of theatre
- To help develop a knowledgeable, perceptive new audience for the theatre and for the arts in general
- To stimulate participants' imaginations, creativity, and critical thinking skills through engagement with challenging theatre works

The activities are divided into three sections:

- **Preparing Students to View the Play** — activities may include classroom discussion prompts, writing prompts, and theatre games or improvisations
- **Viewing the Play** — including questions for classroom discussion after students watch the performance
- **Follow-Up Activities** — further activities intended to deepen students' personal and intellectual interactions with the play

Additionally, [click here](#) to access supplemental resources which may include links to articles and videos meant to bring further context to this experience.

Our hope is that you will have the time to activate all of the activities in this document; however, we understand that time is among the scarcest resources in a high school classroom. One could maintain a rich experience by engaging in the framing questions, one preparatory activity, post-show questions, and one follow-up exercise. And, of course, please modify these activities — or devise your own — in any way necessary to meet the needs of each student in your classroom.

Some of the activities you'll find on these pages align to the [National Core Arts Standards for Theatre](#), and most will align to your local benchmarks and standards.

We hope that this experience will be enriching and educationally beneficial to your students!



## **ABOUT MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB**

Over the past five decades, Manhattan Theatre Club has been a preeminent producer of the highest quality, award-winning theatrical productions of new works by American and international playwrights. Our over 600 premieres have been produced throughout the country and across the globe and have contributed a proud legacy to the American theatrical canon.

Our artistic mission, which Artistic Director Lynne Meadow created and has implemented since 1972, is to develop and present new work in a dynamic, supportive, environment; to identify and collaborate with the most promising new as well as seasoned, accomplished artists; and to produce a diverse repertoire of innovative, entertaining, and thought-provoking plays and musicals by American and international playwrights in our theatres each season. Our commitment to excellence extends to every aspect of the company: from the gifted permanent staff; to a supportive Board of Directors; to a first-rate Education program, which has served more than 100,000 students of all ages in New York City, across the country, and around the world; to a quality, paid career training program, which prepares the next generation of theatre professionals for jobs at MTC and beyond; to a robust behind-the-scenes developmental program for new work. MTC performs in multiple venues: our Broadway home at the 650-seat Samuel J. Friedman Theatre—formerly Biltmore Theatre—which we restored and reopened in 2003, and at New York City Center off-Broadway, where we created a 300-seat Stage I and a 150-seat Stage II.

MTC productions have earned 7 Pulitzer Prizes, 30 Tony Awards, 51 Drama Desk Awards, and 49 Obie Awards, amongst many other honors, but our success is not measured by awards. Instead, the merit of our work is represented by the output and talent of the myriad of writers and artists who have debuted at MTC and who continue to return for multiple productions. We are proud of the artists whom we have discovered and nurtured, as well as their impact on our industry.

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

Manhattan Theatre Club's New York premiere production of Qui Nguyen's *Poor Yella Rednecks* opened at City Center Stage I on November 1, 2023. It was directed by May Adrales. The cast included Jon Hoche, Ben Levin, Samantha Quan, Jon Norman Schneider, Maureen Sebastian, and Paco Tolson. The set design was by Tim Mackabee, costume design by Valerie Thérèse Bart, lighting design by Lap Chi Chu, original music and sound design by Shane Rettig, and projection design by Jared Mezzocchi.



## **CHARACTERS, SETTING, AND TIME**

TONG

HUONG / SAN / COP

QUANG NHAN / BOYFRIEND / COWBOY / CHRIS / 2ND GROCER

PLAYWRIGHT / LITTLE MAN

IMMIGRATION OFFICER / STAN LEE / BOBBY / TOMMY / GROCERY BOY

SETTING/TIME:

El Dorado, Arkansas. 1981.



## PREPARING STUDENTS TO VIEW THE PLAY

### FRAMING QUESTIONS

Either through classroom discussion or individual journaling, ask students to reflect upon these questions:

- What does it mean to make a home? What does it take?
- What is/might be the experience of starting life over in a new and different country and culture? What are/might be the challenges in making a new home there?
- What does it take to repair ruptures in relationships?

### WRITING ACTIVITY: PERSONAL JOURNAL

*National Core Arts Standards: TH:Cn10.1-1.a.*

**The dilemma for the play's characters of trying to assimilate while preserving their cultural and ethnic identity creates a central tension in *Poor Yella Rednecks*. Quite possibly this is a fraught issue for your students as well. In raising the topic, we are moving into an area of sensitivity and subjectivity, but one that is essential to a full consideration of the play. Proceed with care and sensitivity. Make sure students feel safe and are not pressured to share.**

Ask the students to do a written reflection responding to the following questions:

- Think about a time in which you realized you were different from a group or community and felt different from those around you. What are the things that distinguished you from the group?
- Was there a time when the things that make you different created tension or at least heightened awareness of your "otherness?" How did the tension resolve? Did you take any actions to resolve it?

### ACTIVITY: AMERICAN CULTURE COLLAGE

*National Core Arts Standards: TH:Cr1.1-1.a., TH:Cr1.1-1.b., TH:Cr1.1-11.a., TH:Cr2-11.b., TH:Cr2-111.a.*

Using photos, graphics, advertisements, and texts from magazines and newspapers, have students work in groups to create collages of American Popular Culture. Encourage them to make bold, splashy choices, reflecting the overwhelming proliferation of images and



nearly incomprehensible social phenomena that confront new immigrants in this country. In addition, encourage students to create sound tracks to “accompany” their collages, playlists that might include commercial jingles, popular songs, street sounds, etc.

## **VIEWING THE PLAY**

You’ll receive a link and password to the performance recording of the play on the first weekday of the month for which you registered to view the play. The recording may be viewed only during regularly scheduled class time in classrooms or assembly spaces on your campus. Viewing credentials may not be shared with students for individual viewing at home or on social media.

You may wish to assign each student to “track” a character during the performance using a [Character Profile Form](#).

## **CLASS DISCUSSION**

*National Core Arts Standards: TH:Re7.1-1.a., TH:Re8.1-1.c., TH:Re9.1-1.b., TH:Re9.1-1.c.*

After viewing the play, use these questions to facilitate a class discussion about the theatergoing experience:

- What moments in the production were particularly vivid and powerful?
- What was surprising?
- What was confusing to you?
- What were the pivotal moments?
- Who of the characters seemed most sympathetic? Why?
- Which characters were less admirable? Did they have redeeming qualities that helped you understand their behavior?
- Why do you think the playwright wrote this play?
- How did the different characters relate to the idea of making a home?
- What was the effect of the rap numbers and the use of other non-naturalistic elements? Did the musical numbers contribute to the play’s overall effectiveness? Why or why not?
- What challenges do you think the characters will face as they move forward with their lives together?



## **FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES**

### **MONOLOGUE WRITING: MORE LIKE THEM/LESS LIKE ME**

*National Core Arts Standards: TH:Cr1.1-II.c., TH:Cr1.1-III.c., TH:Pr4.1-I.a., TH:Pr4.1-I.b., TH:Pr4.1-II.a., TH:Cn11.1-I.a.*

Now that the students have seen *Poor Yella Rednecks*, ask them to create a character and write a monologue based on the theme “More Like Them/Less Like Me.” Students can write autobiographically, but it may be preferred for students to develop a fictional character.

Share and discuss the students work with care and sensitivity.



## **SCENE WRITING: RUPTURE AND RECONCILIATION**

*National Core Arts Standards: TH:Cr1.1-III.c., TH:Cr2-III.b., TH:Pr4.1-I.a., TH:Pr4.1-I.b., TH:Pr4.1-II.a.*

Structurally, *Poor Yella Rednecks* can be viewed as a play about a rupture and a reconciliation between the two central characters. The following scene-writing activity will enable students to explore that dynamic in personal terms, drawing on their lived experience.

Working individually or in small writing groups, ask students to write a scene on one or the other of the following prompts:

### **Scene One**

#### **Title: "I'm out!"**

A scene in which a domestic relationship between two characters ruptures. The scene ends with the line "I'm out!"

Consider:

- The specific causes of the mess, the disruption.
- How the characters accuse each other and defend/justify or fail to defend themselves. What tactics do they use?
- Concluding the scene with a song lyric, perhaps a duet, the last line of which is "That's it. I'm out!"

Before writing dialogue, have students complete the following profiles:

#### **Character A:**

Relationship to B:

Name:

Age:

Occupation:

Current Residence:

Life Wish or Goal:



**Character B:**

Relationship to A:

Name:

Age:

Occupation:

Current Residence:

Life Wish or Goal:

Reasons for the rupture:

**Scene Two:**

**Title: "Cleaning up our Mess"**

A scene in which two characters who have made a mess of their relationship attempt to reconcile.

Consider:

- The specific causes of the mess, the disruption.
- The offer by one character, maybe both, of a gift of some kind as part of the effort to reconcile.
- Do they succeed? (Note: your scene should have some kind of resolution, but it need not be conclusive.)
- Including, perhaps concluding with, a song lyric, perhaps a duet.
- Including the line, "I (or we) did this all wrong the first time."

Before writing, complete the following profiles:

**Character A:**

Relationship to B:

Name:

Age:

Occupation:



Current Residence:

Life Wish or Goal:

**Character B:**

Relationship to A:

Name:

Age:

Occupation:

Current Residence:

Life Wish or Goal:

Reasons for the rupture:

Share and discuss the students' scenes. What's particularly striking and interesting in each one? How do the various treatments of the same topics (rupture or reconciliation) differ from one another?



## **DRAWING CONNECTIONS**

*National Core Arts Standards: TH:Re7.1-III.a., TH:Re8.1-I.b., TH:Re8.1-II.b., TH:Re8.1-III.b., TH:Re9.1-III.c., TH:Cn10.1-I.a., TH:Cn11.1-I.a.; TH:Cn11.2-I.b.*

*How does this play connect to the world around us?*

Individually or in small groups, ask students to find an article, news feature, interview, or other recent artifact from current events that reflects one of the play's themes or ideas. Then, have students share and discuss:

- Why is this theme or idea relevant today?
- Have they encountered the theme or idea in other artistic mediums or media?
- Does this new information alter your personal response to the production? If so, how?

*What did we discover?*

Ask each student to identify a topic in the play with which they were previously unfamiliar. The student should gather as much information as they can on this subject and share with the class. Sources could include articles, news features, videos, interviews, or other relevant artifacts. Guide students through the compilation of research and the structure of the sharing as best appropriate for your subject area and curricular goals.

## **FEEDBACK FOR MTC**

We appreciate that you chose to bring Manhattan Theatre Club's production of *Poor Yella Rednecks* into your classroom, and we hope that your students had a great experience with these activities and the play.

You'll receive an email at the end of the month in which your class had access to the performance recording. Please complete the Lights Up! Library Feedback Form linked in that email so that we can continue to improve this initiative.