



**Lights Up! Library  
Classroom Activities**

***Vietgone*  
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 *Vietgone* 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 *Vietgone* opened at City Center Stage I on October 25, 2016. It was directed by May Adrales. The cast included John Hoche, Jennifer Ikeda, Raymond Lee, Samantha Quan, and Paco Tolson. The set design was by Tim Mackabee, costume design by Anthony Tran, lighting design by Justin Townsend, original music and sound design by Shane Rettig, and projection design by Jared Mezzocchi.

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

1. QUANG

2. TONG

3. ASIAN GUY, AMERICAN GUY, NHAN, KHUE

4. ASIAN GIRL, AMERICAN GIRL, THU, HUONG, TRANSLATOR, FLOWER GIRL

5. PLAYWRIGHT, GIAI, BOBBY, CAPTAIN CHAMBERS, REDNECK BIKER, HIPPIE DUDE

SETTING:

Arkansas

TIME:

1975

## PREPARING STUDENTS TO VIEW THE PLAY

### FRAMING QUESTIONS

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

- Have you ever left home to move elsewhere? Where and under what circumstances? How did you feel about relocating?
- Did you form a special bond/friendship/closeness with someone particular in your new home or community? What was the effect of this connection?
- What do you know about Vietnam, the Vietnam War, and America's involvement?

### WRITING ACTIVITY: LEAVING HOME

*National Core Arts Standards: TH:Cn10.1-II.a., TH:Cn11.1-II.a.*

Ask the students to write a poem entitled "Leaving Home." The poem can take any form they choose: free verse, rhymed, haiku, etc.

Options/Variations

- Create a rap entitled "Leaving Home." (*Vietgone* features rap numbers throughout.)
- Incorporate the phrase "Gonna start again" as a refrain in the poem or lyrics. (Tong's rap starting on page 23 uses this refrain.)
- (For ambitious, musically adept students) Set the rap to music.

Ask students to share their poems to the extent they are comfortable doing so.

### ACTIVITY: AMERICAN CULTURE COLLAGE

*National Core Arts Standards: TH:Cr1.1-I.a., TH:Cr1.1-I.b., TH:Cr1.1-II.a., TH:Cr1.1-III.a., TH:Cr2-II.b., TH:Cr2-III.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 their leaving home?
- What was the effect of the rap numbers? Did the musical numbers contribute to the play's overall effectiveness? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Qui Nguyen used non-naturalistic elements like dance and martial arts sequences?



## FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

### **SCENE WRITING**

*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.*

Write a scene for two close friends in which one is desperately attempting to persuade the other that the course of action they are contemplating is foolhardy, futile, and indeed dangerous.

Consider: What is the contemplated course of action. What might be the consequences? Where does the scene take place? What tactics, arguments, and strategies does the one friend use to prevent the other character from disaster?

Ask students to share their scenes to the extent they are comfortable doing so.

### **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 *Vietgone* 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.