

# AFRICAN AMERICA

{ by Warren C. Bowles }



**THE UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE OF A NEAR-MAGICAL AFRICAN MAN** LEADS A VERY MODERN INTERRACIAL COUPLE TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF THE MODERN AFRICAN DIASPORA AND THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE, AND HELPS THEM CONSIDER HOW TO CONNECT WITH AND **CELEBRATE ONE'S HERITAGE.**

**A RESOURCE GUIDE**



# ABOUT MIXED BLOOD THEATRE

## ABOUT MIXED BLOOD THEATRE

On August 28, 1963, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered the famous speech in which he spoke of his dream that all people could pay positive attention to each other's differences and similarities. He believed that would yield equality and freedom. The **Mixed Blood Theatre Company** is a professional, multi-racial theater ensemble dedicated to the spirit of Dr. King's dream.

**Mixed Blood's** home is a historic 1887 firehouse that has been converted into a flexible 200-seat venue allowing a variety of seating and stage configurations. The theater's main performance space is the **Alan Page Auditorium**, named in honor of Minnesota State Supreme Court Justice Alan Page, a champion of social justice and racial equality, a former Minnesota Viking inducted into the National Football League Hall of Fame, and founder of the Page Education Foundation (which provides funds for post-secondary education for students of color).

At **Mixed Blood** good theater is a vehicle for artistry, entertainment, education, and effecting social change. Through casting and content this theater portrays a world on its stage not only as it is or was but also as **Mixed Blood** would like it to be. From musicals to extravaganzas to intimate chamber theater to political satires to comedies and dramas, **Mixed Blood** produces new plays on its main stage in predictably unpredictable ways, including one play each year that is produced in English and Spanish with a bilingual cast.

**Mixed Blood** doesn't characterize itself as *multi-cultural*, but rather *culturally-specific* times five...or fifty...or five hundred. **Mixed Blood** aspires to be a model of successful *pluralism*. The theatre has many culturally-specific theatrical productions that tour to hundreds of schools, community centers, campuses, theaters, and workplaces across the country. These shows fill a void in the curricula of schools, provide (and sometimes portray) role models of color, and demonstrate the possibilities of live theater as a voice for the unheard and as an instrument of change. These offerings may include:

- *According To Coyote*, an energetic collection of American Indian legends featuring the wise/brave/foolish trickster Coyote.
- *Daughters of Africa*, a music-driven history of African American women, celebrated and overlooked.
- *The Deaf Duckling*, the story of a deaf child born into a hearing family intertwined with that of the classic fairy tale.
- *Dr. King's Dream*, a brilliant depiction of the great civil rights leader's life and career.
- *Hijab Tube*, offering a unique perspective on Islam in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.
- *Minnecanos*, a buoyant celebration of Chicano cultural history embracing four generations and the entire 20th century.
- *Theory of Mind*, a sensitive yet unsentimental portrait of a young man with Asperger's Syndrome.

## SEEING A PLAY

**SEEING A PLAY SHOULD BE AN EXCITING, ENTERTAINING, AND EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE.** This can easily be done if one understands the traditional agreements between the audience and the performers; each expects the other to be at their best and both are an integral part of the live performance experience. Here are some guidelines the audience should follow to make sure that the experience is a successful one for all.

1. Be on time. Tardiness disregards the effort of those who are on time.
  2. No eating or drinking during the performance.
  3. No talking during the performance.
  4. No throwing objects.
  5. Turn off all cell phones, pagers, and text-messaging devices.
  6. Watch the show with an open mind. Remember what you liked and didn't like. Be prepared to discuss the performance when you return to the classroom. Make note of questions and comments that you might have about any aspect of the performance. What connections does the show have to you and your life?
  7. Be respectful and attentive.
  8. Follow your school's procedure for dismissal from an assembly.
- Mixed Blood's school performances last about 45 minutes. Make the necessary preparations so that you can stay seated through the entire performance.
  - Often, if time allows, there will be a post-performance discussion with the cast. Be prepared to discuss the performance.
  - As you prepare to see the show, review the pre-performance discussion questions and time line. Research not only the elements that most interest you but also those elements that are completely new to you.
  - After you have seen the show review the post-performance questions. Discuss the elements of the show that were enjoyable. Identify and discuss new vocabulary words. Identify and discuss the plot and themes of the story. Compare your overall opinions of the performance and, if possible, write them down to share with the presenting company.

## About the play

It is often said that the problem with stereotypes is not that they are no true but that they are only a partial truth.

When the playwright first arrived in Minnesota his expectations were influenced by the stereotypes that said that Minnesota was not only “the Land of 10,000 Lakes” but that it was also a Scandinavian state. His school, however, drew heavily on the Diocese of New Ulm and Stearns County’s Diocese of St. Cloud so many of his classmates had a German, not Scandinavian, background. Some were fluent in German because that was their family’s first language. The stereotype was only a partial truth.

Fast forward four decades and the Scandinavian Minnesota stereotype is not as dominant as it was. Even in smaller Minnesotan communities one does not have to look far to see Asian faces, Hispanic faces, the faces of Pacific Islanders, and many, many African faces. In looking at these African faces the new stereotype is that they are all victims of some indeterminate civil war or genocide from some indeterminate African. Yet many young African professionals, students, and, yes, even three of the Minnesota Vikings have spent almost their entire lives in the United States. They are as Minnesotan as any of us. The stereotype is only a partial truth.

*African America* is an exploration of who these new Americans are, where they come from, and, most importantly, how we can help them fit in in their new home.

**Ethiopia** Located in Northeastern Africa in what is known as the “Horn of Africa.” Ethiopia is a landlocked country bordered by Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, and Sudan. The official name of the country is the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and its capital is Addis Ababa. Area: 425, 186 square miles (Minnesota: 87,014 SQ. MI).

The principle religions are Muslim and Ethiopian Orthodox.

The population as of the 2007 census is approximately 74,000,000. The principle languages are Amharic and English with some Tigrinya, Orominga, Guaraginga, and Somali.

**Kenya** Located in East Africa along the Indian Ocean and bisected by the equator. Kenya is bordered by Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Sudan. The official name of the country is the Republic of Kenya and its capital is Nairobi. Area: 224,080 square miles (Minnesota: 87,014 SQ. MI).

The principle religion is Christianity with some Muslim and indigenous beliefs.

The population is 37,000,000. The principle languages are Swahili and English.

**Liberia** Located on the West coast of Africa along the Atlantic Ocean. Liberia is bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire. The official name of the country is the Republic of Liberia and its capital is Monrovia. Area: 43,000 square miles (Minnesota: 87,014 SQ. MI).

The principle religion is Christianity with some Muslim and indigenous beliefs.

The population is 3,476,608. The principle language is English.

**Somalia** Located in Northeastern Africa in what is known as the “Horn of Africa” along the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Somalia is bordered by Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. The official name of the country is the Federal Republic of Somali or Somali Democratic Republic and its capital is Mogadishu. Area: 246, 201 square miles (Minnesota: 87,014 SQ. MI).

The principle religion is Muslim.

The population 2003 was estimated by the United Nations at 9,890,000. The principle languages are Somali and Arabic with some English and Italian.

## Time Line: Ethiopia

- 3.4 million BC** *Australopithecus afarensis* (“Lucy”), the first known hominid, lives in the Afar region of northern Ethiopia in the Danakil Depression.
- 500 BC** The Aksumite (Axumite) Empire is founded. It is an influential trading empire.
- 325-328 AD** Aksum adopts Coptic Christianity with the influence of Frumentius and Aedisius.
- 6<sup>th</sup> Century** The Falasha or “Black Jews” arrive in Ethiopia.
- 7<sup>th</sup> Century** Islam influence in the horn of Africa begins.
- 1316** Long conflict with Muslims begins with the overtaking of the Muslim community of Yifat. A Muslim Holy War is declared against Ethiopia in 1332.
- 1528-31** Muslims succeed in the Battle of Shimbra and conquer much of Ethiopia under the leadership of Ahmad Gran. Ten years later the Portuguese aid in fighting Muslims.
- 1769-1855** The “Zamana Masafent” or “Age of the Princes” is an era of feudalism.
- 1855** Kasa is crowned Emperor Tewodros II thus uniting Ethiopia.
- 1868** April 10, Tewodros is defeated by British forces and commits suicide. Yohannes IV becomes emperor.
- 1895** Italians invade Ethiopia at Tigray but are defeated at the Battle of Adwa on March 1, 1896 by Emperor Menelik. Italy recognizes Ethiopia’s independence but retains control of Eritrea.
- 1889** Addis Ababa becomes capital.
- 1928** Haile Selassie becomes king and in 1930 is crowned emperor.
- 1935** Italians invade Ethiopia, capture Addis Ababa, and combine Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Italian Somaliland to form Italian East Africa.
- 1941** British defeat the Italians with help of Ethiopian resistance.
- 1952** United Nations federates Eritrea with Ethiopia.
- 1962** Haile Selassie annexes Eritrea, which becomes the 14<sup>th</sup> province of Ethiopia.

- 1974** Haile Selassie is overthrown in a military coup.
- 1977** Somalia invades Ethiopia's Ogaden region but is defeated with the help of Russia and Cuba.
- 1984-5** Famine kills nearly a million people.
- 1988** Ethiopia and Somalia sign a peace treaty.
- 1993** Eritrea becomes independent following a referendum. By 1999 Ethiopian-Eritrean border clashes expand into a full scale war.
- 2000** Ethiopia and Eritrea sign a peace agreement. Ethiopia withdraws from Eritrea and by 2002 an independent commission draws up a new Ethiopian-Eritrean border.
- 2006** Tensions rise between Ethiopia and Somalia. A UN report says that Ethiopia has violated a 1992 arms embargo on Somalia by supplying the interim government. Eritrea is accused of supplying the rival Islamist administration.
- 2007** Ethiopia celebrates the start of the new millennium according to the Coptic Orthodox Church calendar.
- 2009** Ethiopia completes its withdrawal of forces from Somalia.

## **Time Line: Liberia**

- 1820** The *Elizabeth* sails from New York to the West coast of Africa with 86 passengers mostly free blacks but with white agents of the American Colonization Society and the United States government.
- 1822** Colonists are attacked by indigenous ethnic groups.
- 1824** ACS names the new colony Liberia and establishes the capital of Monrovia, named for the U.S. president James Monroe.
- 1836** Thomas Buchanan, cousin of U.S. president James Buchanan appointed governor of Liberia.
- 1839** The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Liberia is adopted.
- 1842** Joseph Jenkins Roberts is the first official black governor of the Commonwealth of Liberia.
- 1847** Liberia becomes independent and the Liberian Declaration of Independence is adopted and signed. Joseph Jenkins Roberts is elected the first Liberian president.
- 1860** With the help of the United States Liberia expands its territorial boundaries.
- 1862** The United States formally recognizes Liberia's independence.
- 1917** Liberia declares war on Germany when pressured by the U.S. Germany shells the capital, Monrovia, and cuts economic ties.
- 1930** President Charles D.B. King resigns after a League of Nation report exposes forced labor practices that resemble slavery.
- 1943** President Franklin Roosevelt stops in Liberia while visiting American troops in Africa.
- 1944** William V.S. Tubman becomes president and tries to unite all of Liberian society with the indigenous tribes. Liberia declares war on Germany and Japan.
- 1955** Liberian Constitution is amended to allow Tubman to serve beyond two terms. Political opponents S. David Coleman and his son are killed by Liberian soldiers.
- 1962** U.S. Peace Corps program begins in Liberia and will continue until the civil war in 1990.
- 1971** Vice President William Tolbert becomes president after the death of President Tubman.

- 1973** After the Yom Kippur War Liberia joins 28 other African nations in severing ties with Israel.
- 1978** President Jimmy Carter conducts the first official U.S. presidential visit to Liberia.
- 1980** Indigenous Liberian army sergeant, Samuel Doe, orchestrates a coup and kills President Tolbert and 13 of his cabinet ministers.
- 1985** Samuel Doe becomes Liberia's 20<sup>th</sup> president.
- 1990** Start of a seven year civil war in which hundreds of thousands of Liberians will be killed and exiled. Warlord Charles Taylor leads the rebel forces. Samuel Doe is executed.
- 1994** Liberian National Transitional Government headed by David Kpomakpor is installed. Civil war continues.
- 1995** First Abuja Accord is signed in Abuja, Nigeria and installs a second transitional government.
- 1997** Charles Taylor is elected president.
- 1999** Fighting continues along borders of Guinea and Sierra Leone. President Taylor declares a state of emergency in 2002 and by 2003 rebels threaten Monrovia.
- 2003** Nigerian peacekeepers and U.S. troops arrive in Liberia. Charles Taylor flees Liberia.
- 2005** Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is elected president. This is the first time a woman has been elected as an African head of state.
- 2006** Charles Taylor appears before a UN court in Sierra Leone on charges of crimes against humanity. His war crime trial will be held in The Hague in 2007.
- 2008** President George W. Bush visits Liberia while conducting a tour of Africa.

## **Timeline: Somalia**

- 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.** Arab tribes from Saudi Arabia migrate to Somalia fleeing persecution. The sultanate of Adel is established. Over the next three hundred years Somalis convert to Islam influenced by the Saudi Muslims.
- 1854** British explorer Richard Burton enters Somalia.
- 1860-88** France establishes a colony on the Somali coast which will eventually become Djibouti, Britain establishes the protectorate of Somaliland, and Italy establishes a colony in Southern Somalia.
- 1936** Italian Somaliland is combined with parts of Ethiopia and Eritrea to form Italian East Africa.
- 1941** British occupy Italian Somalia.
- 1950** UN establishes a trust territory in southern Somaliland (Italian Somaliland) and hopes to grant Somali independence in ten years.
- 1956** Italian Somaliland is renamed Somalia and gets internal autonomy.
- 1960** Somalia gains its independence from Britain and Italy and the United Republic of Somalia is formed with Aden Abdullah Osman Daar as president.
- 1967** Abdi Rashid Ali Shermarke is elected president.
- 1969** General Mohamed Siad Barre leads a successful military coup. President Abdi Rashid Ali Shermarke is assassinated. Siad Barre will declare Somalia a socialist state and nationalize most of the economy.
- 1970** French Somaliland gains its independence and becomes the Republic of Djibouti.
- 1972** Mohamed Siad Barre establishes a standard script for the Somali language.
- 1974** Somalia becomes a member of the Arab League.
- 1974-75** After a severe drought Mohamed Siad Barre loses popular support.
- 1977** Somalia invades Ethiopia to try to annex the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. Ethiopia defeats Somalia with the help of Russia and

- Cuba. Mohamed Siad Barre expels his Russian advisors and tries to gain support with the U.S. government.
- 1979** Somali Salvation Democratic Front is established to overthrow the government.
- 1981** Somali National Movement is formed to overthrow the government.
- 1989** United Somali Congress is formed in the south to occupy Mogadishu and oust Mohamed Siad Barre.
- 1991** Mohamed Siad Barre is ousted. The Somali National Movement declares northern Somalia independent as the Republic of Somaliland. The United Somali Congress and other factions fight for power in Mogadishu.
- 1992** United Nation forces with U.S. forces arrive in Somalia as peacekeepers. Mohamed Siad Barre flees to Nigeria.
- 1993** Two U.S. Black Hawk are shot down in Mogadishu. In the ensuing battle between U.S. forces, including Army Rangers and members of the Army Delta Force, and the Somali forces of Mohamed Farrah Aidid nineteen Americans and more than a thousand Somali are killed.
- 1995** Mohamed dies in exile. United Nation forces are pulled out of Somalia.
- 1996** Mohamed Farrah Aidid is killed during fighting between factions.
- 2000** Abdulkassim Salat Hassan is elected president of Somalia by clan leaders, senior figures, and elders meeting in Djibouti.
- 2004** Indonesian tsunami hits the coast of Somalia killing hundreds.
- 2005** Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Ghedi survives an assassination attempt.
- 2007** Ethiopian forces enter Somalia to defeat Islamic ‘jihadists’ and will remain for two years.
- 2008** Somali pirates begin hijacking commercial ships for ransom. U.S. begins its fight with radical Al-Shabab.
- 2009** Somali parliament, meeting in Djibouti, elects Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed president.

## **Bibliography**

### **Modern Nations of the World Series:**

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**Kenya**, Laurel Corona, Lucent Books, 1999.

**Liberia**, Debra Miller, Lucent Books, 2004.

**Somalia**, Salome C. Nnoromele, Lucent Books, 2000.

### **Visual Geography Series:**

**Ethiopia in pictures**, Jeffrey Zuehlke, Lerner Publications Co., 2005.

**Kenya in pictures**, Catherine Broberg, Lerner Publications Co., 2002

**Liberia in pictures**, Thomas Streissguth, Lerner Publications Co., 2006.

**Somalia in pictures**, Janice Hamilton, Lerner Publications Co., 2007.

**This child will be great: memoir of a remarkable life by Africa's first woman president**, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Harper, 2009.

**Wangari's trees of peace: a true story from Africa**, Jeannette Winter, Harcourt, 2008.

## Web Resources

<http://www.vgsbooks.com> is an extension of Lerner Publishing Group's Visual Geography Series® (VGS) and your one stop resource for links to additional country-specific information, up-to-date statistics, photographs and maps students can download into their reports, and much more. VGS Has done much of the Internet research for the student. Researchers at Lerner Publishing Group have combed the Internet for reputable and reliable websites.

<http://www.knowitall.org/gullahnet/teachers/> designed to introduce Gullah culture and language to children on the Web, although people of all ages may enjoy the site. Includes teacher resources and classroom activities for exploring Gullah culture.

<http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/afolk/afolktg.html> A unit to study African folktales and designed to meet the California Language Arts Standards. In this unit, students will learn the characteristics of various types of folklore including proverbs, fables, and folktales. They will specifically learn about these types of folklore through the reading African examples of these genres. Further, students will demonstrate the knowledge they've gained reading the various types of folklore through written products, possible multimedia products and oral presentations.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/africa/tools/culture/goals.html> Teaching tools and lessons plans for the study of African culture developed by PBS.

<http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/byrnes-africa/aindex.htm> Lesson Plans for Teaching About Africa in the Early Elementary Grades

## Discussion Questions

Although specific lesson plans will vary from classroom to classroom according to the needs of each individual teacher, preparing the students beforehand will help them better appreciate the play they are about to see.

For many of the youngest students (K-2) this may be the first play they have ever seen. If your school chooses to send kindergarteners to the performance be prepared to hear them laugh enthusiastically and inappropriately from the moment the actor first opens his or her mouth. Unless they have been told otherwise they usually assume that all performances are interactive comedies. Preshow questions for K-2 might center on what a play is.

- We will be seeing a play that tells the story of people who were born in Africa but who now live in Minnesota. What is a “play?” **(Story told/performed by actors; set gives us hints about location; lighting can tell us time of day and sometimes location; costumes help define characters; sets, props, and costumes can establish time period and location.)**
- What is Africa and where is it in the world?
- What do we mean when we speak of our “imagination?” How might using our imagination help us as we watch this play? **(Imagination will help the students watch the play as if they were in the room listening to Abraham talk. Imagination will help them ‘see’ the places that Abraham is describing.)**

Students in grades 3-5 can be prepared with more detailed questions about Africa and African Culture.

- If the main character in this play, Abraham, is a magical, imaginary person did the things we are about to see in the play really happen? Are the actors just making up their words? **(Although the dialogue in this play was created by the playwright much of it comes from his research about Africa and African culture.)**
- What do you already know about Africa?
- What are a few things that you would *like* to know about Africa that we can watch for in the play?

The questions will become even more detailed for the older students.

- We will be seeing a play about African culture. How does a play differ from a film or television program? What advantages/disadvantages does each have? **(Film allows for a more fluid shift from scene to scene and between time periods; film allows for larger casts and more expansive panoramas - and, yes, car chases and crashes and explosions; because a play is not driven by visual images as much as film is, the play will focus on character development and story more; a play is more demanding on the audience members, who must work to follow the story and understand characters; the play demands that the audience members use their own sense of imagination; in film the director has control of the camera so the audience will see exactly what the director wants them to see and *only* what he/she wants them to see.)**
- It is said that the actor and the audience are the two most important elements in theater. What is the role of the audience? How does the audience influence the play? **(A play changes in subtle ways with each performance. The actors can tell when the audience is making the effort to follow the story and understand the characters it encourages the actors to give a better performance. If audience members are talking, being disruptive, or just not paying attention it can be difficult for the actor to concentrate and it can make the actor wonder if this audience really wants his/her best effort. )**
- What do you already know about the countries?

Suggestions for post performance questions for younger students include:

- You've told someone that you just saw a play about people from Africa who now live in Minnesota and they asked you, "what are those people like?" In just a few sentences, how would you answer that question?
- Who was Abraham and why was he visiting D and Miss P?
- Can each of you remember three new things that you learned about Africa?

Suggestions for post performance questions for older students include:

- When did this new wave of immigrants from Africa start arriving in Minnesota? How old were your parents at this time? Your grandparents? Was your school already built? A local sports stadium, freeway, or other landmark?
- What are the three largest groups of African immigrants in Minnesota?
- What did we learn from this play about Africa and African culture? Why should we have taken the time to watch a play about this topic?

What follows are some examples of lesson plans and exercises that relate to the play. There is software available to help the teacher develop puzzles (like the word search we've included) and crosswords. A search of the internet will yield more, free lesson plans and exercises.

## Photo Analysis

This activity could be adjusted for any age group but may be particularly effective for fourth grade and older. After showing the students a relevant photo (The Visual Geography Series and its web enhancement is a good source of photos) ask them to answer the questions on the worksheet. Older students can be asked to answer step three in great detail.

### Photo Analysis Worksheet

#### Step 1. Observation

A. Study the photograph for 2 minutes. Form an overall impression of the photograph and then examine individual items. Next, divide the photo into quadrants and study each section to see what new details become visible.

B. Use the chart below to list people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

Activities	People	Objects

#### Step 2. Inference

Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer from this photograph.

#### Step 3. Questions

A. What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?

B. Where could you find answers to them?

## African America Word Search

X E M T Q B A S N C L C A E M  
Z Z I T X L I N M H A L C T A  
N I G E R A L I D A R A T H C  
C O I C D A A L J A R C D I I  
Z P O Y U K M M M V O T F O R  
I L T R A S O O C S M K E P F  
M E A B E A S T A L G E R I A  
B B C B H M M F T G M N P A H  
A O E V E D A O T V N Y S F T  
A C H A D N P C R A L A D A U  
S Y W L I B E R I A O N I I O  
C M E K G I A N G O L A E R S  
O F R T N T C W K T N E K D N  
T U G N Z E N I G E R I A K Y  
B X C M V S O M A L L L Q S G

ANGOLA  
ALGERIA  
BENIN  
BURKINA FASO

CAMEROON  
CHAD  
ETHIOPIA  
KENYA

LIBERIA  
NIGERIA  
SOMALIA  
SOUTH AFRICA