

**A TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE TO
JUNEBUG/JACK
A COLLABORATIVE PRESENTATION BY
ROADSIDE THEATER AND JUNEBUG PRODUCTIONS**

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES TO PREPARE STUDENTS TO VIEW THE PLAY

Any group of students will get more out of seeing JUNEBUG/JACK if they can spend some time beforehand thinking about the issues with which the play is going to deal and becoming familiar with how the play will be dealing with those issues. For instance, it will be helpful for students to know that this play does not have a plot; it is not like a half-hour television show where we watch characters deal with and eventually resolve some problem. It is more like a thematic album of songs and stories with connecting links. **In the pre-viewing activities that follow, students can consider the play's title, have discussions about the theme of difference, and do an exercise that includes reading the summary of the play and collecting their own stories.**

THE TITLE A good place to start in preparing students to see the play is the title: JUNEBUG/JACK. The title is never explained in the play, and although there is a character in the play named "Junebug" and another character named "Jack," the names of those two characters never occur together in the play as they do in the title.

Why, then, should the play be called, JUNEBUG/JACK? Why not "JUNEBUG and JACK"? And why use a slash mark? Why, if the names are to be joined, not: JUNEBUGJACK? There are no answers to these questions actually stated in the play, but the title certainly invites us to consider them. Those two names joined (or separated) by a slash can represent an idea central to the play, but there are many possible answers to what that central idea is. Sometimes the title of a thematic album will focus all the issues raised by the album, at other times it seems the album title is simply a title, a handle, something to call it. In this case it is possible to get some ideas from the title and use the title as a focus, although students may differ in how helpful they consider the focus.

One approach to the title and the play can be developed from the following two excerpts. Ask students to consider how they might relate to the title. The first excerpt follows the story of how "Junebug Jabbo Jones" learned to read, write, and tell stories:

Before long there were a lot of [storytellers] going around, watching, listening, and learning and telling stories to whoever wanted to hear. All of them doing it under the title of "Junebug Jabbo Jones."

The second excerpt is the end of a long story about how "Big Jack" and his brother, "Little Jack," get the best of a rich man they call "the King."

And to this day, Big Jack, Little Jack, all their children, grandchildren, and greats are adoin' well.

What is the first excerpt about? What is the second excerpt about? What idea is common to both excerpts?

Junebug is a mythic African-American folk character invented by people from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during the 1960's to represent the collective wisdom of struggling black people. **Jack** is the archetypal Appalachian hero. Usually he is a boy of indefinite

age living in poverty with his widowed mother. Jack's story varies according to the difficulties and forces of power he encounters. Both Jack and Junebug represent the triumph of wit over power or the human spirit over oppression. Does this information affect your ideas about the title?

THE WAYS WE ARE DIFFERENT It's good to be able to talk about differences in cultural heritage without evaluating one culture against another. JUNEBUG/JACK specifically explores two cultures: African-American and Appalachian; but it is a central idea of the play that we cannot understand, accept, and profit from a culture different from ours until we have studied, understood, and feel pride in the culture (or cultures) which are our own. Another way to put this would be to speak of differences rather than cultures: we cannot understand, accept, and profit from the ways in which other people are different from us until we have studied, understood, and feel proud of the ways in which we are different from other people. Learning about how differences can be studied and expressed -- through stories and songs -- can give us ideas about how to study and express all that is valuable in the ways we are different.

You might start students thinking about how they are different from other students in their own classroom with a discussion of **foods**. Ask students what foods are special in their immediate family, or in their extended family. Keep students focused on finding differences and feeling proud of them. This should not be a discussion of favorite foods -- many students may not even like the foods that are special in their family.

After you have collected some "data" about special foods, ask the students to consider how the groups defined by these special foods differ. Are the groups limited to single families or do they extend back through several generations? Are the groups related in any way by geography? Are the groups related by religion? Are these groups different in any ways other than special foods? Are there differences in dress, pastimes, holiday customs, birthday traditions, humor, gesture, or language? Even if the "group" is only a single family, some of these differences may apply. What happens when someone gets sick in this group? What happens at dinnertime? What places in the home or around the home are "special"? Are there any family jokes? How much time do people in this group spend alone? Who makes decisions? How are young children treated? Who takes care of them? How are they put to bed?

After students have shared some of their answers to these questions, ask students what songs or stories they think of as important in the "group" from which they come. What stories about the group does everyone in the group know? What songs does everyone know? Start students thinking about why these stories and songs might be important. To whom are these songs and stories most important? Which members of the group tell and sing them?

JUNEBUG/JACK has a lot to say about the value of our own stories. If students can become aware of their own stories--stories from their childhood, their family, or their culture--before they see the play, they will probably feel more engaged in the play. Students could share stories orally or in writing, in small groups or as a full class. By having their own stories and images in mind as they watch the play, students will be able to see parallels between their own experience and the experiences described by the characters. They will also be able to "fill in" the play with images and stories of their own, and through doing this, enrich their own experience of the play.

SUMMARY OF THE PLAY AND STORY COLLECTING

Student handout pages 1-4, which can be copied and given to each student, suggest a good exercise for before or after seeing the play. Reading the summary before seeing the play, and collecting some stories as suggested, will certainly enhance their experience, as well as help them understand the purpose and means of collecting their stories.

AFTER YOU SEE THE PLAY

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES TO EXTEND STUDENTS' THINKING ABOUT JUNEBUG/JACK

Even if students simply recall for themselves and for each other the parts of the play they found memorable, this recollection will bring back and fix in their minds the personally important images and words of the experience. An activity such as those suggested below can contribute enormously to the impact of the play.

RECONSIDERING THE TITLE An obvious first activity is to return to some of the ideas students were working with before they saw the play. If you talked about the title, return to that question now that you know better how Junebug and Jack are a part of the play and of their cultures. Does the slash mark in the title make any more sense now? What are the different meanings for the format of the title? Is it possible to give that slash mark two or even three “best” meanings at the same time?

STORYTELLING This play gives storytelling a significance far beyond mere entertainment; it is, in the vision of the play, a way that we find out about each other and about ourselves. Through telling stories we can both remember who we have been and discover who we are.

In groups of four to eight (or as a whole class) take turns telling stories. (If you told or wrote stories before the play, share these or share some new ones.) Don't think too hard about the story. Don't try to make it the one most important story. Just tell a story. Don't think about whether your story will be a “good” one or whether someone else's story is better.

Try to make it a story which is “one of your stories” rather than a borrowed one. The plot of a movie or a TV show is not really one of “your” stories. It doesn't, however, have to be true; you could make your story up. It's your story as long as it's important to you. (During storytelling, be sure to **listen** closely to each other; don't prepare or worry about your own story as you listen. You've got to have faith that in listening to other people's stories your own story will come to you. In a sense you should think of “picking up” with your story where the last person left off; let the last thing the person before you says remind you of a story you can tell. That way you will have to listen very closely. Good listening is crucial.)

After you have all told your stories, think about what you have learned about the people in the group. What new feelings do you have about them? What new questions do you have? Think also about how it felt to tell your story and be listened to. Do stories make you feel “different” from people or the same? Or both in different ways? Do stories make you understand anything about where people are “coming from” or where people are going?

Of course, some stories will have no particular effect. Just notice this and don't worry about it. On the other hand, some stories are very powerful in helping us both to understand ourselves and others. Notice this, too. And think about it.

COLLABORATIVE STORY WRITING Think about the “Jack” story in the play. This was not the story of any one person in the play; it was not an individual story; no one person told it. The story Ron told about his buddy in the war is an individual story, but the Jack story is a collaboration. It is not only in acting it out that it is a collaboration; it is also based on a collaboratively written script. Work on developing scripts from one or more of the stories that have been shared. This takes some patience, but it can be fun to do, and the performance of it can be memorable.

Choose a base story to work with (a story from one of the members of the group; or a combination of several stories from the group) and start someone telling it. Think about how the actors told the story in the play; sometimes an actor would have several sentences to speak; sometimes each actor would say only one or two words of a sentence. Think of ways to break up the telling of the story among the members of the group. Each group member can write down his or her own lines; nobody needs to have the full script unless the group prefers it. At some points you might seek some advice from other students or the teacher to help you in making some artistic decisions about how to proceed and what to include.

Add to the story as you prepare the group script. Everyone should think of things to contribute. It should start to feel less like it is owned by the teller of the base story, and more like it is owned by the whole group. Once it gets written down, run through it several times, making adjustments -- small additions, rearrangements, and deletions. Try to have the same variety of speakers that you heard in the Jack story: have a few lines that everyone says, a few in pairs, some sentences read all by one speaker, some sentences divided up.

Perform your group story for the class. Don't hold off performance until it is perfect, the point of this is not a polished product but a participatory process.

REREADING THE SUMMARY Use the summary as a basis for discussion. See if any new stories were “triggered” as the students watched the play.

TEXT RENDERING Ask students to look at the song lyrics included with this study guide. Ask them to write down one phrase or sentence that they like or think is important. When everyone has something chosen, do a Quaker Meeting-style recitation, each person saying the line when he feels moved to say it. Repetition of the same line will have the effect of planting the line more firmly in everyone's head. This works best if there is absolute silence except for the lines: no calling on people, no encouragements like “C'mon, somebody say something!” no approvals like “Good choice.” Put some effort into the quality of the listening; it will have an effect. If everyone listens well, you will be able to hear the difference in the recitations, and you will hear the listening. This is a powerful activity.

SONG LYRICS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS On student handout pages 5-8, which can be copied and given to each student, you will find the lyrics of four songs from the play and discussion questions pertaining to each. These questions can be discussed in a story-circle format or can be assigned as a writing exercise.

STUDY GUIDE FOR A SONG FROM JUNEBUG/JACK

BROTHER TO BROTHER

Now that you've gone away
The sunlit days don't seem as warm as they used to be.
Since you're not here with me
What once was clear now seems all lost in a mystery.

Brother, are you safe and well? There's so much to tell.
I need me someone just to talk to.
Brother, won't you come home soon?
No one else can cheer me, no one else can chase away the gloom.

Brother, why'd you go away?
Brother, what's a hero? Leaving home makes no sense to me.
Daddy said you had to go away.
Tell me what you're fighting for.
Brother, help me understand your wars!
Brother, help me understand your wars!

Stay safe, my brother.
Hurry home, my brother.
There's someone here who needs you
And loves you.

Brother, what's a hero?
And why do you have to go away to be one?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This song is sung by a woman, a soldier's sister. Do you think it is a "woman's song"? Are the concerns of the song "women's" concerns?

The singer of this song is confused about war. Is this confusion a more or less advanced state of understanding? Does the singer see more or less than the people who assume the necessity of war?

How does this song relate to Junebug's statement early in the play "everybody was so busy trying to take care of themselves that they didn't take the time to stand back to look at the big story that included

everybody.” Is the singer of this song more concerned about herself or more concerned about the “big story” that includes everyone?

Student handout page 5

STUDY GUIDE FOR A SONG FROM JUNEBUG/JACK

CITIES OF GOLD

Tell me where do you come from?
Tell me where will you go?
To the mountains around you
Or the Cities of Gold?

Cities of Gold, Cities of Gold.
Oh so lonely and so cold.
You can lose your very soul
Living in the Cities of Gold.

Now the people they said to Pharaoh
You better let our children go
‘Cause we’re tired of livin’ our lives
So you can build your Cities of Gold.

Cities of Gold, Cities of Gold.
Oh, so lonely and so cold.
You can lose your very soul
Living in the Cities of Gold.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What two choices does the person being spoken to have of places to go? Which of these two places did the person come from? Which one of these two places is a “new and unknown” place? Which one is an “old and familiar” place?

What two words are used to describe the “Cities of Gold”? What is the one thing you would lose in these cities?

What “Pharaohs” are there in Kentucky or in your own community? Who did Pharaoh’s Cities of Gold get built for? Who built them? Who do the Cities of Gold in your world get built for? Who builds them?

Cities of Gold don't necessarily have to be cities; they don't have to be places. They could be professions, organizations, or ways of life. If the person who sings and believes in this song were to give a talk to a class of graduating seniors, what do you think he or she would say to them? Is this the same message you hear from advertising? From your family? From your friends? Where do you hear messages like the one being expressed in this song?

Student handout page 6

STUDY GUIDE FOR A SONG FROM JUNEBUG/JACK

THE ONLY WAR THAT'S FAIR TO FIGHT

The only war that's fair to fight
Is the war to end oppression.

The only war that's fair to fight
Is the war to win your freedom.

The only war that's fair to fight
Is the war you fight to win your human rights.

The only war that's fair to fight
Is the war to end oppression.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Personal freedom is different from universal freedom. Is this song about fighting for "my freedom" or about fighting for "Freedom"?

Many people would say that no one is really free unless everyone is free. In other words, I can't base my freedom on the enslavement of someone else. So, if I fight a war to win my freedom, I should also be fighting a war to win freedom for everyone on the other side. If I fight for human rights, I should fight for everyone's human rights. It is not a partisan effort, but a universal cause. Can you think of cases where people say they are fighting for universal Freedom, but are really interested only in their own personal freedom? Clearly everyone cannot be free to do anything they like. What would you propose as a definition of the freedom to which everyone has a right?

The song mentions that there is only one war that is “fair”-- then it names three wars: the war to end oppression, the war to win your freedom, and the war to win your human rights. All three of these names are names for the same war: the war of liberation to full humanness. There are many more names for this war; it is really any war that is waged in the interest of all people. Brainstorm as many names for this war as you can. Try to think of at least 30 ways to say the name of this war.

Student handout page 7

STUDY GUIDE FOR A SONG FROM JUNEBUG/JACK

VIET NAM

I.

I went walking one morning,
The devil took me by the hand,
Said come on let me show you
 round my little place.
I call it Viet Nam.

Ain't so much to look at,
Just a quaint little jungle land.
Before I'm through
It'll mean the world to you.
You won't forget Viet Nam.

CHORUS:

Viet Nam, where the sweetest flowers
Died on the vine.
Viet Nam, it'll steal your heart,
Steal your mind.

III.

Mama, don't you know me? I'm the boy next door. Can I come home?
Mama, don't you know me? I'm the boy next door. Can I come home?

II.

Come all you space-age children,
You ain't never gonna understand,
If you want to see real living and dying,
Come over to Viet Nam.

Pride's the first thing to leave you.
Your fear is the last thing to run.
You can't see too well
When you're staring into hell
Down the barrel of a gun.

CHORUS:

Viet Nam, where the sweetest flowers
Died on the vine.
Viet Nam, it'll steal your heart,
Steal your mind.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Using the other lines in the song, figure out (in groups) what meanings you could give to “flowers” and “vine.” See if there are variant readings possible of “It’ll steal you heart/ Steal your mind.” What is the relationship between the different meanings of the chorus, and the last five lines from the second verse?

Do these lines have anything to say about “hearts” and “minds”? When a person’s heart and mind are both gone, what is left? Do these lines from the second verse say anything about what it is that is left?

At the end of the song there is a repeated line about coming home. The speaker of the line says he is the boy next door. Why do you suppose it is a boy next door asking to come home rather than a son asking to come home? In other words why would this soldier be asking permission to come home from his neighbors rather than from his parents?

Student handout page 8

REMEMBERING, FINDING, COLLECTING AND TELLING YOUR OWN STORIES AS A WAY TO MORE FULLY APPRECIATE THE PLAY:

As you consider the following summary of the play, remember, or find, your own stories or your family’s stories. This will enhance your understanding of the play and allow you to take an active role as an audience member. An exchange can occur between you, the action of the play, and characters on the stage; you see how their stories fit into your experiences and how your stories fit into theirs.

After each summary section there are some “trigger” questions to help you seek out or remember your own stories. Choose at least three of the different sections below and find stories from your own life, or from your family, which pertain to that section.

SUMMARY OF JUNEBUG/JACK

IN AND OUT OF TIME The play begins with a movement back. The actors begin the play in the audience and move to the stage at the same time that they are singing “Homeward Now Shall I Journey”; they move back in imagination to the home base of their identities, to the place they came from. There is a sense, also, in the words “to life unending and beyond it” of moving outside of time, out into that which is timeless and unchanging. This travel backwards and forwards and beyond time is accomplished primarily through the telling of stories.

What stories can you find about you or your family that are about a home base. What stories about the past are still connected to you or your family today. Traditions help us move backward and forward in time. What are some of your family traditions?

STORIES In this play you will hear many stories; some stories that sound made-up but still tell the truth and other stories that tell the truth and sound like they really happened. You’ll hear some of these stories in songs where only the edges of the stories get told and you have to fill the story in with your

own ideas. All of the stories you will hear are other people's stories, but as you listen to these stories be sure to keep in mind that your own story is the one that is most important to you. You should be thinking of your own story as you listen and watch.

What is a story about you or your family that is important to you? What is a story that is important to someone else in your family? Why are they important?

Student handout page 1

ORIGINS "Where We Came From" is a theme in every person's story. The first section of the play starts the story of African-American experience and of Appalachian experience with talk of "Our Ancestors"; how they came to this country and how they made this country a home.

What are your family's origins? Find a story that tells about these origins.

FREEDOM Another of the central themes of people's stories is freedom, and freedom is one of the central themes of this play. Some people have had to fight for their freedom; many people have suffered and many people have died in the cause of freedom. Two songs, "Which Side Are You On" and "We Shall Overcome", originated as songs about the struggle for freedom--of Appalachian coal miners and African-Americans. In the play, these songs begin separately but eventually become parts of one song, a song about the larger fight of all men and women to claim their human rights and be free.

Sometimes strange things happen with songs. Sometimes two very different uses will be found for the same tune--for example, "My Country 'Tis of Thee" has the same tune as the British National Anthem. This is what happened when blacks appropriated "Dixie"--a song emblematic of the Southern Confederacy--and converted it into "Jubilo," a song used to celebrate the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

The "Freedom Section" of the play ends with the song "John Henry." This is a song about freedom and sacrifice: "before I'll let that steam drill drive me down, I'm gonna die with a hammer in my hand." It's a song about commitment and the importance of freedom, but it is also a story about a black man. Carl leads into the song by saying, "Everybody knows this one..." but not everyone thinks of John Henry as black. Sometimes people sing a song in ways that suit their own ideas. For some people who sang this song, John Henry couldn't be a hero and black at the same time. That's why, at the end of the song, John says very pointedly, "John Henry was a black man." One of our struggles in learning to live together is to share our heroes without having to make them just like us.

The issue of freedom can take many forms, but all of them involve struggle. Whole nations, peoples, and groups seek freedom, but other freedoms are very personal struggles, like the struggle to

be free from peer pressure--to do or not to do what only you believe is right. That is a form of setting yourself free. Are there any stories about freedom in your family? in your school? in your own life?

HOW STORIES AND STORYTELLERS ARE BORN The story of “Junebug Jabbo Jones and Crazy Bill” is a story about the telling stories and making of storytellers. If you’re going to be a storyteller, there are two things to understand. The first thing is that not all stories are STORIES. STORIES are not LIES. LIES cover up the truth. STORIES uncover it. STORIES uncover the truth so that “everybody can get something good out of [them]”--that’s what Junebug says. The second thing to understand is that getting something good out of a story doesn’t mean you necessarily feel good; some stories might make you feel ashamed. It depends on what the stories uncover and who you are. Stories can make us think, and stories can make us change. These are the kinds of stories Junebug tells, and that’s the reason he tells them.

Student handout page 2

“The Story of Jack” is a long, humorous story told by three actors at the same time. Sometimes they take the parts of different characters; sometimes they take different parts of a single sentence. This is a different style of storytelling from Junebug’s, but it has the same purposes. Jack is a hero who avenges the injustice done to his brother by outwitting an oppressive rich man simply called “King.” There is a lot to think about in considering the similarities and differences in these two stories. In both stories, workers are opposed to masters: in Junebug’s story the groups are defined by race, but in “The Story of Jack” there is no racial distinction in the two groups. Socio-economic class can define groups as rigidly as race. It is ironic that groups with common problems can feel as much, or more, hatred of each other as they do for their common oppressors.

Who or what are the storytellers in your own community today? in our culture today? What purpose do these contemporary storytellers serve? What role do they play? Are they telling lies, covering up the truth for their own benefit in their stories, or are their stories for the good of all? (Isn’t the power of cliques and gangs perpetuated by the stories people tell about the people in those groups? What are some other powerful uses of stories today, both for good and bad purposes?)

MOVING AWAY After a song about the things from home that make us glad we were born (most of these are food), the actors start talking and singing about leaving home, leaving the rural community where common culture is strong, where shared values are almost inevitable. The question of why it is people want to leave home and whether or not it is good to leave home serves as an introduction to the beautiful but sad song “Cities of Gold.” “Po’s Song” considers those same questions but from the other side, from the viewpoint of a person who can’t wait to get to someplace else. “Zudio” hints at what you have to do to make a disconnected life work; and the second part of “Po’s Song” explains what Po tries to do when “making it work” doesn’t work for him.

What stories about you or your family can you find about moving away from home to a new, strange place? How were you/they accepted? What were the difficulties? What values from the old home did you/they carry on to the new home? How did these help or hurt?

FURTHER AWAY When people leave the rural community for the city a feeling of rootedness, or cultural sharing is lost; when people leave the country to go to war this separation increases. Junebug tells about the Korean War; Ron tells about Viet Nam. The songs “Brother to Brother” and “Viet Nam” both look at the costs of war; the first from the point of view of those left at home, the second from the point of view of a soldier.

Not all the fighting people do takes place in wars. In fact the most important battles are the battles we fight daily for justice and freedom. Ron’s story tells of racial intolerance that kills people in a different way from bullets or bombs but is just as deadly. This story relates one small incident from the larger battle that is described in “The Only War That’s Fair to Fight.”

What battlefields do you see around you today? Why do these battlefields exist? Find a story about how race and/or class differences have affected you or someone you know or a story of how it affected someone in your family in the past.

Student handout page 3

COMING BACK What is the answer? The first step toward an answer is to get the question right. What do we all deserve? What do we all have a right to expect? This is the question stated in “The Tree of Life.” It is not just a question for the actors and the characters in the play but a question for all of us to ask and to answer seriously. That is why the audience is asked to join in singing this song. The play began in the audience, in our common experience, and now it is working its way back to that community.

The final song is a rap about injustice, “What Did They Do With What They Took From You?” but it is also a rap about connection: we are all in this together, nobody can be free unless we all are free. This is not a problem to think about once in a while; it is a pressing concern. Next time the world will die in fire, not water; we’ve got to do something to keep that next time from happening. We’ve got to tell stories we can be proud of and live our lives by them, and we’ve got to live our lives in such way that we have many proud stories to tell.

Find a story about how you, your family or someone you know overcame such intolerance and fought for the good of a larger group of people. How does/did that effect a whole community? Tell a story about how you and your friends could do something to give everyone in your school the “common right”. Why should it be harder to organize INclusive, peaceful, productive groups, than it is to organize groups, clubs and gangs that are EXclusive, angry, elite, and violent?

Effective story collecting is done by really listening while the person tells you their story. If you need to take brief notes to help you remember, you can. If you need to write out the story, do that at a later time so you can really pay attention to the storyteller’s way of telling the story--their inflections and emotions while speaking. This will make the story come alive when you share it with others later. If you collect from an older person, or

someone you cannot see often, you can record the story as he or she tells it. Be sure you have asked that person's permission to record their story!

Student handout page 4