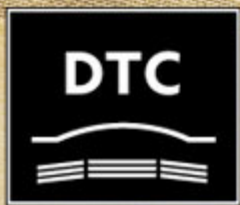
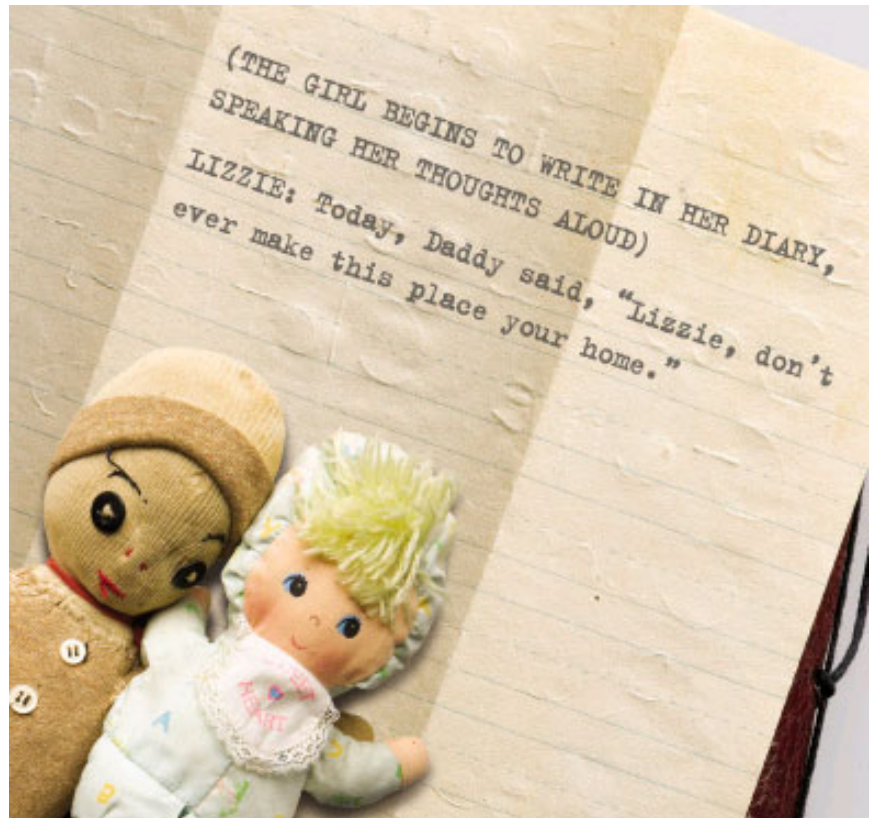


INSIGHTS

DTC's Teacher Resource

THE SYRINGA TREE

by Pamela Gien



DELAWARE THEATRE COMPANY

SOME THINGS YOU JUST GOTTA SEE.

A Word From The Author

The Syringa Tree is an epic story, a love story about a family and a place. It's about the inhumanity of racism, the love between a child and her caretaker, the laws which separated black children from their mothers, a deep and abiding love of the land, and the spiritual connection between the earth and its people. It speaks of the pain of exile, the longing and remembrance of a time of innocence, that place in all our hearts where we knew no judgement, only curiosity and love. And of the ultimate sacrifice, the giving of one's life for freedom, the legacy of those children who died at the hands of the police in South Africa.

As a young person, I saw three choices: the path of the revolutionary; the path of denial, not very difficult with the heavy media censorship that prevailed; or getting as far away from it as possible. I left, not able to bear what was happening, entering into a painful silence about a place I loved so much. I didn't realize the depth of my desire to escape, clouded as it was by the curiosity of youth. I wanted to see the world.

As I began to write, instead of silence and confusion, a well of grief opened up, grief and joy, loss and remembrance, and exquisite gain. I wrote for weeks with tears pouring, and suddenly I had *The Syringa Tree*.

I am haunted by the children who lost their lives for freedom. *The Syringa Tree*, in the end, is a tribute to them. I feel grateful that somehow, I was chosen to be the vessel of this story in the world. I stand humbled by what they did, proud and grateful. As a child of South Africa, stunned into silence so long ago, my deepest desire is that the voices of the children of South Africa ring out in freedom. May they shout in joy forever.



Pamela Gien
From "The Seeds of *The Syringa Tree*",
United Nations Chronicle Online Education,
Volume XXXVIII, Number 2 2001.

INSIGHTS

Delaware Theatre Company
200 Water Street
Wilmington, DE 19801
(302) 594-1104

2005-2006 Season

THE SYRINGA TREE

by Pamela Gien

**Producing Director
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**Director of Education
Charles Conway**

**Associate Director of
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Johanna Schloss**

**Artistic Associate
David Stradley**

**AmeriCorps Public Ally
Education Apprentice
Anna Tudor**

**Education Assistant
Suzanne Goddard**

**Contributing Writers
Charles Conway
Suzanne Goddard
Mary An Love
David Stradley**

**Layout and Design
David Stradley**

**Visit our Website at
www.delawaretheatre.org**

Characters

The play is designed to be played by any number of people from one up and has been played primarily as a one-woman show. Delaware Theatre Company's production will be performed by two actresses—one black and one white.

Gien says she wrote autobiographically at first but that later "it developed as more of a fictional story, deeply involved with aspects of my life. I chose names of people I loved and who inspired me, but with the exception of the grandparents, whom I have depicted with the most accuracy my young memory at the time allows, all the other characters are built out of inspiration and imagination." The play and the characters, then, are not strictly autobiographical.

Elizabeth Grace

Narrator of the story. We see her at various ages but mostly at age six. She is white South African of English heritage. She is rather precocious and lively. She is imaginative and inquisitive. She has seen things most six-year-olds would not have done (a birth, for example). There are horrors lurking not far beyond her safe world and perhaps that is why she wets the bed. She is well versed in the local tales, superstitions and beliefs and seems to make no distinction between them and other beliefs. She and her family are not churchgoers.

Loeska (Lucia) Hattingh

Elizabeth's best friend and next door neighbor. She is Afrikaner (therefore white) and her father is a minister. She is very proud of her heritage, dismissive of local customs and of the English South African's tendency to treat the local peoples better than people of her heritage. She is eight years old.



Xhosa woman in traditional garb

Salamina Mashlope

She is a thirty-nine-year-old Xhosa—a local tribal subdivision—and speaks her local language (which she has passed on to Elizabeth). She is pregnant when we first meet her with a child whom she will have to hide because the child does not have the prerequisite papers to live legally in a white area. If discovered, the child will be removed from her and sent to Salamina's parents in Soweto (one of the black townships into which black South Africans were forced under apartheid). She is loving and caring and has more affect on Elizabeth's life on a daily basis than her real mother.

For information on Xhosa, see the following website. Much of the information is post-apartheid so please access the history content.

<http://webs.wofford.edu/mandlovenb/SAfrica/content/xhosa.html>



Pamela Gien in THE SYRINGA TREE

Characters (cont.)

Eugenie Grace

Elizabeth's mother, in her early thirties. She is distantly kind to servants on a daily basis. She does, however, clearly care and is willing to take risks for them as she goes searching for Salamina's daughter when she goes missing. She is not a natural mother but is a loving wife who seems indispensable to her husband. She is often tired and has many headaches. People are always being admonished to be quiet as she is sleeping. The situation in the country takes its toll on everyone who cares and this is, perhaps, her way of expressing her tension as Elizabeth's is bed-wetting.

Moliseng Ellesebett (Elizabeth) Mashlope

Salamina's daughter. Born and raised in secrecy and always with the necessity of hiding from the authorities hanging over her head. She is, however, brave and her demise is entirely due to this character trait.

Iris Kgobane

She is nineteen and is nanny to Elizabeth's new brother John. With help so cheap and the local people so keen to work, it was very easy for each child to have its own nanny and the parents a fleet of help.

Iris is a Sotho, another local tribal division and speaks differently from Salamina. To find more about Sotho, see the following website:

<http://countrystudies.us/south-africa/47.htm>

Peter Mombadi

He is in his forties and works as the Graces' driver. As stated before, this division of labor was very typical as help was so cheap. His job entails some danger; as the resistance to apartheid became more vocal and violent, it was common for whites and those with them to be attacked.



Sotho woman and child

Dr. Grace

In his late thirties and Elizabeth's very loving father. He is a caring (and brave) person as he treats both black and white South Africans and, as he describes it, "everything in between" with equal respect. He is busy with his practice but is much more overtly loving than his wife is towards Elizabeth.

Zephyr

In his late sixties, Zephyr is a Zulu. He is the Hattingh's gardener and has lost several fingers—the implication is that this was the result of punishments.

There was a long history of wars between the Zulus and the English but this is not evident in his demeanor towards Elizabeth. For information on Zulus, see the following website:

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Zulu.html>

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Characters (cont.)

John Grace

We see John, Elizabeth's little brother, from his infant days until he is an adult.

Dominee Hattingh

A fifty-two-year-old Dutch Reformist minister and the father of Loeska. He has no sense of humor and the Graces find his presence slightly threatening. He is definitely on the side of the Establishment and, his neighbors believe, would probably report any misdemeanor (like the presence of Moliseng). He is Afrikaner.

Pietros

A Sotho. Part of the Grace family's help. There is an indication that he is part of the movement to subvert apartheid, if not physically, then at least in his heart.

Mabalel

A tiny black girl.

Mabalel

Dr. Grace's skeleton.

Dubike

Salamina's very old cousin so, by extrapolation, also Xhosa.

Matron Lanning

The Baragwanath Hospital Matron.

Young Doctor

Helpful but overwhelmed.

Granny Elizabeth

In her early seventies—a farmer's wife.

Grandpa George

Age eighty-two. Has a farm and a shop from which he gives the local black families clothes for free. He is kind and caring. He never locks his doors and is a little deaf.

Sargeant Potgeither

A police officer who would, of course, be white and who, from his name, is almost certainly Afrikaner.

Father Montford

A Catholic priest

Mrs. Biggs

Spry for her seventies.



Wild syringa tree

The syringa tree

This tree, plotted in the Grace family yard, is so much a part of the consciousness of Elizabeth and the family's help that it is a character in itself. It seems to mean a vast number of things to different people, but to all of them it embodies stability, safety and home. Even when Elizabeth is married and a mother herself, the tree is such a powerful totem to her that she buys a house with a berry-bearing tree in the garden.

Summary

The action takes place in many locations and in several time periods and not chronologically. However, we are always drawn back to the syringa tree. The playwright is insistent that there be no props and that the tree is to be imagined, so it is for the actor/actors to create this world and make the delineation between characters and times clear to the audience. However, the writing is exceptionally good at drawing us into this world. With many short scenes and such shifting time frames and locations it is impossible and unnecessary to give a scene by scene precis of the action so what follows is an overview of the story which we are told by Elizabeth. The play is performed without an intermission.

We are quickly drawn into Elizabeth's life. She is clearly used to playing alone and being cared for by Salamina rather than by her tired and exasperated mother. Salamina is also tired when we first encounter her, as she is pregnant. The child will have to be hidden, as Salamina does not have the correct papers to keep the baby with her. It will also have to be born in secret and Dr. Grace delivers the baby girl (whose middle name is the local equivalent of Elizabeth) together with his wife and in the presence of his daughter. We begin to see the differences between the people who inhabit this country and the underlying current of fear and mistrust that informs their lives at all times. This is not just between the black and white inhabitants but also between the whites of different heritage (and, although it is not overt in this piece, between blacks of different backgrounds).

Elizabeth is clearly as at home amongst the black help and their stories and superstitions as she is amongst her own. This is probably helped by the fact that the Graces do not go to church and so theirs is the only organized system of belief to which she has been exposed. She also plays with Moliseng (Salamina's daughter) and even allows her to play with her toys. There is an easiness between the children almost as of big and little sister.

On a visit to her mother, Salamina leaves Moliseng in Soweto for a stay and Moliseng goes missing. She was taken to and left at a hospital after becoming ill from drinking contaminated milk, but the hospital authorities now say they have no record of her. In desperation Mrs. Grace takes the car to the hospital to search for the child but she is not there and nor are her records. It transpires that several children actually died in the hospital at that time but that others were transferred. Later, an unidentified child in another hospital is found to be Moliseng. The danger into which the Grace family put themselves to try to find her is a testament to the nature of their relationship with the child and her mother.



*Black South African telling story to her grandchildren:
Elizabeth was very comfortable in circles such as these*

Summary (cont.)

The second defining event of the play is the death of Elizabeth's grandfather—a caring, trusting person who has only ever done kindness to his black neighbors. He is hacked horribly to death in his unlocked farmhouse and his wife is badly hurt. For Elizabeth this is doubly traumatizing as Salamina (who is, in effect, her mother and nurturer) disappears as she is so ashamed of what has been done by her black countrymen. Despite searching for her, the family do not find her until years later when she is found working very close to the Grace home. This is, patently, a testament to the insularity of peoples' lives and how well things can be hidden if it is necessary to do so.



Isolated South Africa farm

As tension and violence rises, Moliseng is one of the casualties. At age 14 she is killed as she and a group of other children in Soweto face down a police line. She, along with Grandpa George, is emblematic of the widespread death on both sides of the race divide and the mindlessness of the violence towards people unknown.

Elizabeth moves to America, vowing she will never return to the place which nurtured her and yet took away her innocence far too early. But, she misses the land. It is not just her father with whom she corresponds and whom she adores but it is, predictably, the colors of the soil, the smells, the sudden, violent storms. Her new life in America cannot fill the void which displacement causes. She decides to go home with her husband and baby, George. She brings not only her family but, for the newly re-discovered Salamina, berries from the tree she had in her Pasadena garden—a tree which she hoped would take the place of the syringa tree but never could.

The action of the play (although the two central events drawn from Gien's life are cathartic) is less important than the feel. It conjures the world of Elizabeth with breathtaking clarity.



Lines for the first post-apartheid election in South Africa - this event gave Elizabeth the courage to come home again

About The Playwright

Pamela Gien was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, during the apartheid era. This has deeply influenced her work. She studied in South Africa at the University of Witwatersrand obtaining an Honors Degree in Dramatic Art and English. She moved to the USA and quickly joined the acting company of American Repertory Theatre (ART) in Cambridge, Massachusetts—a place she considers “home” and where her acting credits were extensive.

The play *The Syringa Tree* draws heavily on her own family history. She grew up aware of and amid the tension, violence and mistrust that was rife in South Africa during the repression of apartheid. Two main autobiographical events are encapsulated within the play. Ms. Gien’s grandfather was murdered when she was a mere 10 years old and, later, her nanny did give birth to a child who was subsequently concealed.



Pamela Gien at the 2001 Obie Awards

The play was not designed as a one-woman show, although it has been performed that way for most of its production history. Pamela Gien won a Drama Desk Award for the Most Outstanding Solo Performance for her rendition of the 24 parts. The play won her the Obie for the Best Play in 2001 as well as other awards.

The Syringa Tree marked Ms. Gien’s first attempt at writing for the stage. She has also written the screenplay for “The Lily Field” and has been commissioned to adapt her play into novel and screenplay format.

Her experiences in South Africa obviously had a pronounced effect on her thinking. This is evinced not only by the play but by her comments on how privileged she feels as a white South African to be playing black South Africans on stage.



Gin Hammond in the North American Tour

Production History

1999—*The Syringa Tree* premieres at A Contemporary Theatre (Seattle, WA). Larry Moss directs and Pamela Gien performs all roles.

2000—*The Syringa Tree* opens in New York City at Playhouse 91. Larry Moss directs and Pamela Gien performs all roles. After one year, Kate Blumberg takes over for Ms. Gien.

2002—*The Syringa Tree* opens at the Royal National Theatre (London, England). Larry Moss directs and Pamela Gien performs all roles. A North American Tour of *The Syringa Tree* commenced with Gin Hammond and Eva Kaminsky performing in repertory.

The Syringa Tree has been produced by countless regional theatres throughout the United States.

Thoughts from the Director

I consider *The Syringa Tree* a tribute to the powerful and joyous art of story-telling. It is a rich, textured script that spans a number of decades, embraces many cultures, and even flies across continents. Two extremely versatile actresses, using little more than their voices, bodies and rich imaginations, transform into a variety of characters, male and female, old and young, black and white. All in the blink of an eye.

So it is important to me that the design elements have a beauty, but also a neutrality. Scenically I envision a warm, earthy, open landscape; a clean canvas; an uncluttered sandbox in which the actresses can play. Likewise, the costumes should have a simplicity and a flexibility, but also a strong connection to the land. No quick changes, no accessories. The lights and sound carry more importance then, in enhancing mood and establishing locales, in reinforcing change, helping to transport us to the next room or to the next time zone.

In my mind, the basic conflict of this piece is the devotion to one's homeland versus the overwhelming shame one feels about one's fellow countrymen. As the character of Zephyr says so clearly, "We carry the sin of our brother." And once we acknowledge that shame, our innocence is lost.

I am a big fan of *The Syringa Tree*. It is full of humor and pathos and humanity, profoundly moving in a way that only the best theatre can be.

C. Michael Wright

(Mr. Wright has directed *The Syringa Tree* once before, at Renaissance Theaterworks in Milwaukee, WI.)

Interview with the Playwright

William Kerley interviewed Pamela Gien prior to *The Syringa Tree's* performance at the Royal National Theatre (England). The following is an excerpt from the National Theatre Education Workpack.

William Kerley: Do you welcome it when people want to talk to you after your performance, about The Syringa Tree and about their own experiences in South Africa?

Pamela Gien: I never see it as a demand. I see it as a gift, that people would want to share their very deep feelings with me. We're usually so reticent about being emotional in public, it's difficult enough with people we know, but when somebody comes to me with that depth of emotion I receive it as probably the most profound gift of the piece. It's such an extraordinary privilege to have somebody want to tell me what they experienced via the play, and to share that part of their lives. I must say that it was, at first, a huge surprise, and every time it happens I feel humbled by it, honored by it. I remember much of what people tell me, it's very meaningful to me to know of the depth of their experience, because it tells me that the play is speaking to something greater than all of us, than any personal ego...I get to be in service of an idea, to illuminate something for all of our spirits to understand something deeper. If I can do that, I've done something great in my life. I can die happy knowing I was able to be of some use.

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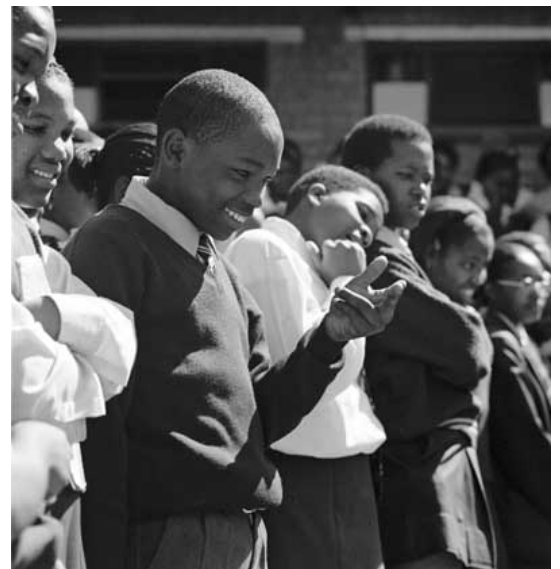
Interview with the Playwright (cont.)

WK: I understand that you are writing the screenplay for the film version of The Syringa Tree. How does it feel to be letting go of the piece to enable it to find its next manifestation?

PG: It will be hugely exciting for me to see other actors playing the roles. To see, for example, an extraordinary black actor play Zephyr. To see Elizabeth as a child, because she's like my inner child. I only have so much energy to perform the play and I can't go all over the world doing it! What's important is the message of the play reaching more people. That's more important to me than people seeing me in it. The idea of the play is that children lost their lives for the very basic freedom that we enjoy. It's a story that haunts me.

WK: When you were growing up, how much were you aware of the truth of the situation in South Africa? Elizabeth in the play says "some things are allowed, and some are not." We know that children can accept whatever structures they're faced with – they can be very adaptable. But how much were you aware of growing up in a political system that was disapproved of by the rest of the world? How did you grow to understand that some things were wrong?

PG: It happens differently for all children in South Africa or in any country where there is unrest. I think I was lucky to be part of a community of people who were a little more aware. I was sent to a school with Irish Catholic nuns. After I left school these nuns were stopped from coming to South Africa because they were seen as trouble makers, because they were admitting black children to white private schools. I was raised by those nuns so I think I was slightly more aware than other children. We used to be driven into the Township of Soweto to sing with a black choir there, and for white children to be taken into the township was a very dodgy thing. My parents had to give permission for me to go. At home, my parents, who are by no means saints or revolutionaries, were, I think, aware of the injustice of what was happening. Particularly my dad, who is a physician, had tremendous compassion, and a different view of things because of what he saw on a day to day basis in his practice. He had a practice that was black and white, and, as in the play, there was the rule of not seeing black patients in the white consulting rooms, and he would talk about the pain of that. He'd also talk about the distress he'd feel when he'd see young South African men coming back from the borders, where they had mandatory military service, and they'd be effectively fighting a war, and they'd come back in terrible states, covered in sores, often very sick. When the army called you, you had to go. Many of these young boys thought they were going to protect their family and their country, but they didn't understand what it was they were fighting for. In some families, one brother went to military service, some were conscientious objectors. So even within families, there was a tremendous division, and different levels of awareness and "some things were spoken of, and some things were not." The media was heavily censored so that if there was unrest in the township, my family might hear about it because my dad would see different members of the community, like policemen, who had some involvement with what was going on. But that was because my dad was the doctor in the community; somebody whose dad was the accountant might not have heard.



Soweto youth at a school like Ms. Gien might have sung at when a child.

(cont. next page)

Interview with the Playwright (cont.)

WK: But it wouldn't have been in the newspapers, or on radio or TV?

PG: No, absolutely not. The government called a state of emergency, which meant that they were justified by law in imposing censorship. A state of emergency would be called when there were unrest or riots, and so the news didn't get reported. It was university students and people from the political left who would be accused of being communists. People like my husband's brother, who were working in the black unions to try to create better education programs for children, would be targeted by the secret police as suspicious. Many such people were put in solitary confinement.

WK: But did you know about that yourself – were you too young? Were you as young as Elizabeth?

PG: I always knew as a small child that there was something wrong with the system. Even in my family there's a different consensus of opinion about that. Some people would remember things that were said and others would not. I remember driving with my dad, one of my favorite things – if there was an emergency call over the weekend, my dad would go tearing out, I'd beg him to let me go with him, I think I thought if I was with him, he'd be all right. We'd listen to Beethoven (featured in the play). I remember a particular day seeing a man urinating in the street, we were still in the suburbs, beautiful homes, and I remember seeing this man, I must have been about 5 or 6, and I shouted - "look at that naughty man, weeing in the road!" And my dad said, "well, where should he go, my love?" The man obviously didn't live thereabouts, and there were no public toilets for him in that area, in fact he wasn't even allowed to be there, so I think those small examples and little lessons were things I would notice, but he never gave us political lectures. We'd have people come to visit who were the other end of the scale, very racist, and it was always interesting to listen to that mentality, quite extreme and quite frightening, but at the same time it represented what was going on all around us.

WK: Were you aware of people having to have passes and restriction on movement?

PG: Absolutely, because we used to go down to the Municipality (Town Hall), when we were taking on a new nanny, to get her a pass, so as a very small child I knew what a pass was. I didn't need one, but they needed one. In the play Elizabeth looks out of the window and sees a man being beaten, as a child I saw that a lot, and sometimes I'd see people running and didn't know why – and then you'd see police vans driving up and down.



Black South African with his government issued passbook

WK: As a child, what did you think about the police?

PG: I suppose I knew that if I got in trouble or lost I should go to the police, but I never really spoke to policemen. They were those people who drove in uniforms up and down the road and had big sticks. From the child's perspective you see them as keeping you safe, and keeping everything alright. But when you see them doing things like that then you're not sure.

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Interview with the Playwright (cont.)



Police action in Soweto

WK: But as a child looking out of that window, and seeing someone getting beaten by the police, does the child think, "they must have done something wrong to be beaten"? How does a child react?

PG: I think I thought they must have done something wrong, that they've come into this area without a pass – as Elizabeth would say "they didn't think, they forgot to think".

WK: What do you hope that young people who have grown up elsewhere, perhaps taking for granted so many freedoms, what do you want them to take from the experience of seeing The Syringa Tree?

PG: Someone said to me that if all these different characters can exist in one body, black, white, old, young; then doesn't that tell us that in some way we're all the same? Each of us has our individuality and our personal, unique qualities, but we're all made of the same stuff. The man who discovered the human genetic code has made it freely available to everyone over the internet because he felt that it's something that belongs to us all, and that no-one should privately own the patent for it. In a way I hope *The Syringa Tree* carries the same idea, that we are all the same, so we mustn't be frightened of other people, because really prejudice lives in fear. I hope they will take the play as an invitation to not be afraid, and to be courageous in our contact with one another.

Teachable Themes

Apartheid

The word "apartheid" is derived from an Afrikaans word meaning "apartness." Although the play does explore the impact of the official laws of racial segregation in South Africa (as created in 1950 by the South African parliament with the Population Registry Act), the play also explores the wider scope of "apartness." Mrs. Grace lives "apart" from her husband—stranded on the farm while Mr. Grace can go out and work and connect to people. She is isolated in South Africa, whose policies she does not agree with, but does not have the avenues to do anything about her feelings. Elizabeth's grandparents live "apart" from the rest of the country, alone on a rural outpost where they are free to live according to their own morals but also left horribly vulnerable to violent attack. Salamina runs away from the Grace household after the death of Grandpa George and goes to work, unnoticed by the family even though they search for her, just down the road at a tea room—evidence of how people can easily live "apart" in this divided country. And then, finally, there is Elizabeth who tries to go to America so she can live apart from the horrors of South Africa—but she can never sever the ties she feels and is forced to return. All of these are examples of how the official laws of apartheid insinuated itself in countless to form an insidious culture of "apartness."

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Teachable Themes (cont.)

Childhood Innocence

Like Scout in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, with Elizabeth in *The Syringa Tree* we see a world of social injustice through the eyes of a child. It is a view that is somewhat disturbing, as questions that haunt us—why has a neighbor’s worker had his fingertips cut off and how does he feel about being forced to sing to Elizabeth?—don’t even register to a child. But more so, we wish that childhood innocence were allowed to impact more of the world so that a young white girl befriending a young black girl was a common act instead of an unknown act of bravery and courage. We are also allowed to see the crumbling of childhood innocence, as Elizabeth flees her homeland as the realities of South Africa’s cruelty are brought to the light of day. But innocence turns into hope, as Elizabeth eventually returns bringing berries in her hand as a gift to Salamina—connecting them both to the syringa tree of her childhood innocence.

Social Protest

Many forms of social protest are explored in *The Syringa Tree*. There is the outward protest of Moliseng facing down a police line in Soweto. But more frequently, we have covert acts of quiet protest and subversive behavior. The Graces conspire with Salamina to keep her unregistered child in their house. Dr. Grace, when he can, helps patients of all colors. Elizabeth’s grandparents provide clothing free of charge to their workers. All of these acts were acts of protest against a system that told a population that they were not all the same. From Moliseng’s loud shouts to Mrs. Grace’s silent drive in the dark night, these were all actions that proclaimed a common humanity. The play itself mirrors this sentiment by having two actors play characters of various races and ages. The actor may be of one skin, but she shares a humanity with the world.



South African youth protesting

Classroom Activities

Before Viewing

- Have students research:
 - Apartheid
 - History
 - Rules
 - Enforcement
 - Ending
 - The Colonization of South Africa
 - Peoples of South Africa
 - African tribes
 - Afrikaner population
 - English settlers

(Cont. next page)

Classroom Activities (cont.)

Before Viewing

- Have students research:
 - Current political climate in South Africa
 - Social Protest
 - Nonviolent Resistance
 - Gandhi
 - Nelson Mandela
 - Martin Luther King, Jr.
 - Student protests
 - Vietnam era
 - South Africa
 - Tiananmen Square
- Have students write:
 - Persuasive speech
 - Against apartheid
 - For apartheid
 - Memoir in which they remember loss of some childhood innocence
 - Story in which someone's eyes are opened about something negative in their own culture
- Have students:
 - Discuss how they would organize a nonviolent protest against something unfair in their school, church, or neighborhood
 - Spend a class period in a "separate but equal" environment
 - Develop an activity in which students are discriminated against because of some arbitrary trait
 - Discuss what it would be like to have to have official documents to move about and out their neighborhoods
 - Deliver the news report about the first free election in South Africa
 - Do a travelogue of South Africa

After Viewing

- *The Syringa Tree* historically has been a one woman show. Discuss how the play might have been performed with only one actor.
- In Delaware Theatre Company's production of *The Syringa Tree*, two actors played 24 different roles. Were you able to distinguish characters and to follow the passage of time? What did the actors do to help or hinder your understanding?
- The staging was purposely stark as it "allows the tree, and the journey of the play, to exist powerfully in the imagination of the audience," according to the playwright. Have students write about or draw the setting as they imagined it and then compare with other students.

For Further Information

To learn more about the background of *The Syringa Tree*, Pamela Gien recommends the work of the following South African artists:

The plays of Athol Fugard
The novels of Nadine Gordimer
The music of Miriam Makeba

On apartheid

"South African History Online" – extensive and authoritative website
<http://www.sahistory.org.za/>

"10 Years of Democracy" – special report by Sunday Times (South Africa) ten years after the first post-apartheid election
<http://www.sundaytimes.co.za/specialreports/10years/>

Apartheid Museum – interesting website for museum in Johannesburg
www.apartheidmuseum.org

On the play

"The Syringa Tree" – official website for the play with history and reviews
<http://www.syringatree.com/>

"The Syringa Tree" Study Guide - exhaustive online study guide from TheatreWorks
<http://www.theatreworks.org/images/syringa.studyguide.pdf>

Books

Kaffir Boy by Mark Mathabane—a gripping true story of black youths coming of age in Apartheid South Africa

Innocents in Africa by Drury Pifer—a memoir of current Wilmington resident Pifer's childhood in South Africa in the 1930s

Addendum

To help give this play a local angle, also included in this study guide is a copy of an article from the Wilmington News Journal about South African athletes on last year's roster of the Delaware Smash.

