



NBCS Meets “Master Harold and the Boys”

Recently, the sixth through eighth graders, their teachers and parents visited Signature Theatre in New York City for a performance of Athol Fugard’s classic personal description of South African Apartheid. Last year the school attended a performance of the vaudeville production of “Old Hats” with Bill Irwin. But this was a very different and sobering experience!

Set in a small South African tea shop in 1950, two black men and a white boy joke and dance together, defying the brutalities of apartheid through their joyous love. The play slowly builds to a dramatic confrontation between Halle, the boy and Sam, his mentor and surrogate father.

In 1982 Frank Rich of the New York Times wrote, 'Master Harold' ... and the Boys. Mr. Fugard's drama - lyrical in design, shattering in impact - is likely to be an enduring part of the theater long after most of this Broadway season has turned to dust.

In the days before attending the performance our students studied South African history, discussed apartheid and slavery, and watched a movie about the lives of Nelson and Winnie Mandella. In school after the performance the students discussed the story, the events behind the scenes and the rich symbolism in the play

Some of the comments written in our students’ essays include:

The term “Master Harold” really upset Sam and Willie. Sam took care of Halle and played with him. And when Halle flipped it was like **our past** all over again. As Sam said, “you can’t fly a kite on a rainy day.

Apartheid is another way of saying separate. This was a big issue in South Africa between white Afrikaans and black Afrikaans. Kids couldn’t even play with each other because of this feud.

What surprised me the most was the 1% of non-colored people had more power than the 99% of colored people.

The play had some very dramatic parts, some were funny and some were upsetting. One of the not so good ones was when Halle spit in Sam's face because I found that very disrespectful. A funny one was when Willie was learning dance and how he was getting upset; it reminded me of me because I also can not dance.

I enjoyed the play; I enjoyed the people in the play and I would go again. The play taught me a lot that I did not know.

The play taught me about history and how some people had different rights than others and if some thing bad is happening and nobody is doing anything you have to step up and do whatever you have to do to make it work ...

I feel the most important part (of the play) was when Sam and Halle flew the kite outside. The kite had some type of sign for freedom because when you fly the kite it is free and loose in the air everywhere. When Halle took down the kite that freedom was lost. Sort of like the black people in South Africa, they didn't have the necessary information or tools to do the stuff the white or wealthy people did. The black people in South Africa took the stuff they had and made the best of it.

There were many signs of symbolism during the play. Like the kite and the bench signified freedom and being trapped. The kite flew free, but it was tied to the bench, and, if it was let go, the kite would go on until it is destroyed. This alludes to how whites trap and ground the black people and leave them captured. Along with this, the bench was a "whites only" bench, placing a greater bind on racism.

Ulysses Morris, Academic Department Head, summed it all up: "this was a real growth experience for our students. They got to see a great performance of a classic play; learn about apartheid in South Africa and compare it to slavery in America. They understood the rich symbolism of Athol Fugard. And, although the play was set in the 1950's, sadly, it still has relevance today. A great experience for our students!"

