

We Own Our Future: A Lesson Plan Unit



Materials by YourWords STL

Featuring the original performance *We Own Our Future*, a collaborative event involving YWSTL, MBU Theatre, and Dream Builders 4 Equity.

**YOUR
WORDS^{STL}**

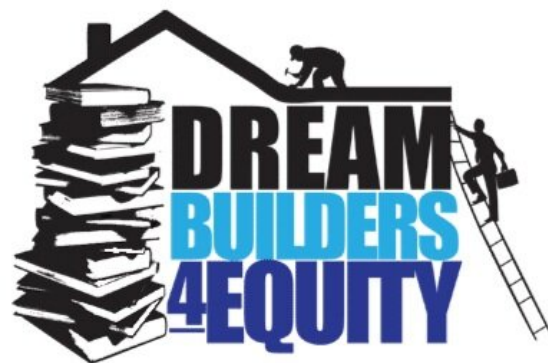
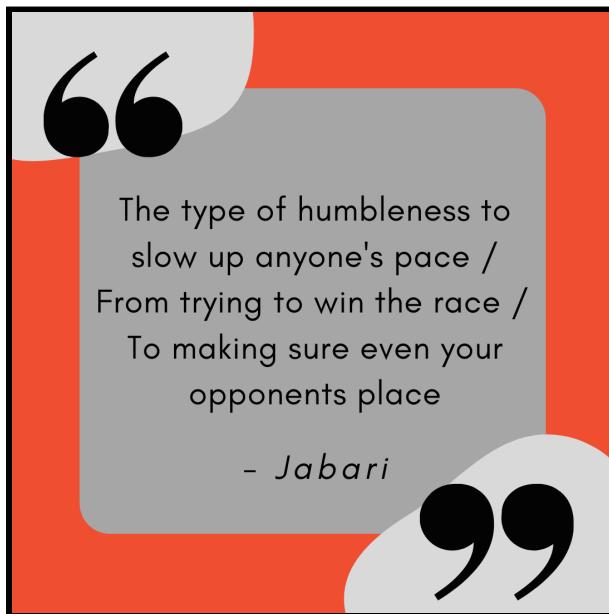


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A Note To Educators

Teachers, thank you for taking interest in sharing the original, collaborative performance *We Own Our Future* with your students.

Who We Are: We are YourWords STL, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that uses tutoring, creative writing workshops, and collaborative projects to help amplify the voices of St. Louis youth. We are committed to bridging racial, cultural, and economic divides by honing young people's abilities to tell their stories while providing opportunities for the community to listen. Since 2015, we have published seven chapbooks of student writing, hosted multiple community events, and touched the lives of more than 2,000 young people (averaging 180 youth annually).

About the Event: One of YWSTL's continuing efforts is to facilitate public performances based on student work. Aligned to this goal, the St. Louis community had the chance to hear the hopes, dreams, and struggles of youth during *We Own Our Future*. This collaborative event involved YWSTL, MBU Theatre, and Dream Builders 4 Equity. Livestream access was available Friday and Saturday, March 26-27, and an in-person, socially distance talkback took place on MBU's campus Friday evening. The youth of DB4E wrote the script, with YWSTL providing writing coaching and inter-organizational communication and MBU Theatre bringing the work to life. The YouTube link included in your e-mail features the original film as well as Friday's talkback.

About These Materials: The purpose of these materials is to provide educators with a structure for showing this performance to your students as well as engaging with its content and themes in meaningful, impactful ways. While we have designed these materials to fit into upper middle school or early high school classrooms, we hope you will adapt these materials as needed to maximize engagement in your unique classrooms. With some slight modifications, we believe this performance can and should be shown to as wide of an age group as possible.

Seeking Future Partners: If you are an educator who is passionate about bringing unifying, amplifying work like this into your own classroom, we invite you to reach out to us! YWSTL is currently in the process of finalizing its programming and partners for the 2021-22 school year as well as beyond. Please reach out to us at any time to share your thoughts, feedback, suggestions, or interest in bringing our programming into your institution or organization.

Background Knowledge

Event Explanation

We Own Our Future is an original performance. Three local nonprofit organizations came together to bring it to life: YourWords STL, MBU Theatre, and Dream Builders 4 Equity. Livestream access was available Friday and Saturday, March 26-27, and an in-person, socially distance talkback took place on MBU's campus Friday evening. The youth of DB4E wrote the script, with YWSTL providing writing coaching and communication and MBU Theatre bringing the work to life. All funds from ticket sales went directly to the student playwrights.



The Three Partner Organizations

YourWords STL uses one-on-one tutoring, creative writing workshops, and collaborative writing projects to amplify the voices of St. Louis youth. We believe we can change St. Louis by empowering young people to tell their stories. Part of our mission is to provide a sense of consistency and security for these students by recruiting passionate, committed tutors and volunteers who are dedicated to attending every weekly session. We are committed to bridging racial, cultural, and economic divides by

honing the ability of people to tell their stories while providing opportunities for the community to listen. Learn more: www.yourwordsstl.org

MBU Theatre is a Christ-centered program that challenges our students to view their work through a Biblical vantage point. We believe that all truth is God's truth, and therefore all great and truthful works of theatre carry within them glimmers of God's redemptive plan. Learn more: <https://www.mobap.edu/academics/fine-arts-division/theatre>

Dream Builders 4 Equity (DB4E) believes equitable opportunities are foundational for youth to realize their fullest potential. We provide at-risk youth with access to a diverse and broad set of assets through mentorship, entrepreneurship, scholarship, and leadership training. Access to these assets provides young people with the necessary skills to succeed academically and professionally and attain ownership in the development of low-income/highly distressed communities. Learn more: www.dreambuilders4equity.org

Playwright Biographies

These playwright biographies were featured in the program for *We Own Our Future*. All of the playwrights are youth from the St. Louis area who are members of Dream Builders 4 Equity.

Jabari Aitch, age 23, is a carpenter and in his spare time enjoys working out, playing video games, and sometimes writing poetry.

Gerald Alonzo Burton Jr. is an 18-year-old senior at Mehlville High School and a member of Dream Builders 4 Equity. In his spare time, he enjoys creating reflective poems as well as enhancing his journalistic abilities.

Scherica Amira Wilson is a 17-year-old junior at Lutheran High School North and a member of Dream Builder 4 Equity. In her spare time she enjoys practicing waxing and tinting eyebrows for her second business as well as exploring ideas to grow her boutique.

Allen Worth, age 20, is a Class of 2019 graduate and a member of Dream Builders 4 Equity. In his spare time, he likes to paint, shoot videos, and throw huge car events.

Actors and Character Descriptions

These character descriptions appeared in the performance's original script, written by the DB4E members. While the DB4E members heavily used their own life experiences as inspirations for the characters they created, the characters in this performance are still fictional extensions of their true selves.

Lauchon: Written and inspired by Allen

17y.o., AA boy, comes from a broken family which has made him unstable and withered his social skills. His intelligence is criminally underestimated.

Junior: Written and inspired by Jabari

16-18y.o., AA boy, who has dealt with violent tendencies due to his battles with bullies when he was younger.

Jordan: Written and inspired by Gerald

18y.o., AA boy, who has shown great promise as a football player, he's proven to be mildly arrogant; he deals with the strain of juggling his passions and what he's expected to become.

Amiracle: Written and inspired by Erica

16y.o., AA female, has dealt with the internal conflicts and trials of losing her mother at an early age as well as having to deal with the lost moments with her father due to his incarceration.

Mr. Gregory

37y.o., AA male, teacher of each of the students who has made conscious efforts to grant the youths with opportunities and to expose them to limits far beyond anything they imagined before.

Cast

Actors of MBU Theatre portrayed the characters. Their roles and bios are provided below.

Alexander Brown (Jordan) has previously been The Lion (*The Wizard of Oz*), General Waverly (*White Christmas*), and Ensemble (*Big Fish*). He is also a strong advocate for civil rights and equal representation both amongst other cultures and his own. He's had the privilege to participate and even speak at several Black Lives Matter events ...

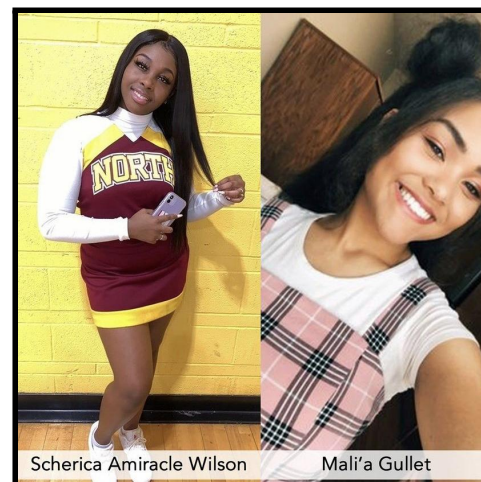
Greg Carr II (Junior) is a sophomore Theatre major. He last appeared as Karl The Giant in *Big Fish* and is looking forward to doing more productions in the future. Some of his favorite roles include Kinesias/The Herald (*The Birds*), Featured Dancer (*The Music Man*), Mysterious Man (*Into The Woods*), Black Stache (*Peter and the Starcatcher*), and Nils Krogstad (*A Doll's House*).

Mali'a Gullet (Amiracle) is a senior at Missouri Baptist University majoring in psychology and minoring in sociology. It is Malia's desire to work in the field of Christian therapy and counseling for sexually abused teens ... Not only does Mali'a act on stage but she is also a singer and dancer. She has opened up for Christian Gray, Dr. Dre, Jimmy Needham and has performed all over Missouri.

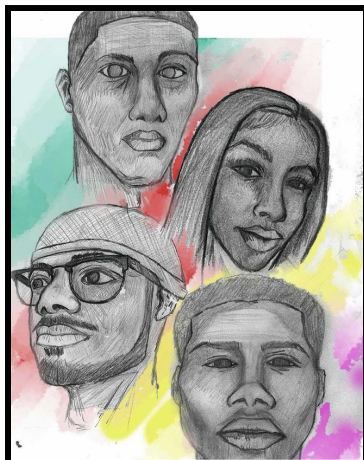
Chris Moore (Director and Mr. Gregory) Born and raised in St. Louis, he has found a great passion for the arts and creative world. He has done work in vocal performance, theatrical direction/ production, dance and composition. Most recent credits include, *Head Over Heels* (New Line Theatre), *Dreamgirls* and *Guys & Dolls* (Stray Dog Theatre), *Bridges of Madison County* (Alpha Players) and *A Soldier's Play* (Clayton Community Theatre).

Cameron Tyler (Lauchon) ... is in his senior year at Missouri Baptist University, majoring in Musical Theatre with a minor in dance. He spent the summer of 2019 performing ... with Paul Bunyan Playhouse, in *Smokey Joes Cafe* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. Some other past productions include *Billy Elliott* (Muny in St. Louis), *Shrek* (Larry D Clark Summer Repertory Theatre), and *Anything Goes* (Missouri Baptist University).

Photos of Playwrights Alongside Their Actors



Original Artwork: By DB4E member and performance design consultant Patrick Gutierrez.

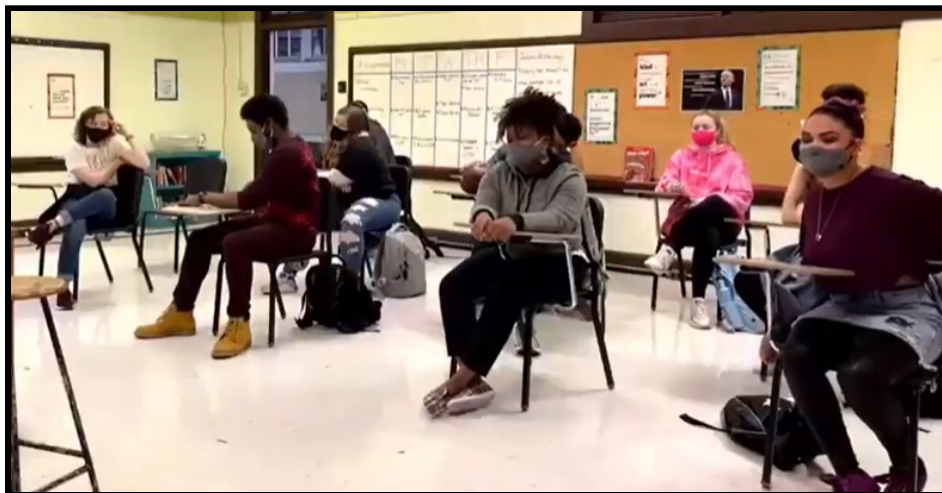


Performance and Talkback Questions

Watch the performance and talkback via the YouTube link. Then, discuss or respond to the questions below.

Performance Comprehension Questions

1. Where does the film take place? Who are the students in the class?
2. What is Mr. Gregory's assignment for break, and how do the students react to the first discussion?
3. Why did Mr. Gregory choose those four students for his group?
4. How is the students' second discussion different from the first discussion?
5. What happens at the end of the film portion? How is this a depiction of "reality"?



Performance Literary Analysis Questions

1. What are the internal conflicts and backgrounds of each character? How do each character's inner struggles compare to their outward emotions, actions, and reactions?
2. How do the set lighting design as well as the characters' costume colors become symbols for each character's identity and struggle?
3. How are the characters' masks also used as symbols throughout the film?
4. What are the various sets, media, and technologies used to bring this performance to life? How did each of these contribute to the overall mood and tone of the performance?
5. What was the effect of the "reality" ending? What effect did this ending have on the overall performance?

Talkback Reflection Questions

1. How did the MBU actors go about the task of performing the words of a real person they hadn't met?
2. What did the actors learn from the experience of portraying these characters?
3. How has each of the playwrights grown through the obstacles of their pasts? How do they plan to continue to grow and learn?
4. What are the most important lessons the playwrights learned from this experience as well as their work with Dream Builders 4 Equity?
5. How do these "roses" plan to cultivate a "garden" in their communities?

**Personal Reflection Questions**

1. Which character inspired you? Saddened you? Motivated you? Opened your heart? Connected with your own personal story?
2. The playwrights had to exhibit courage in order to share their personal stories. Could you do the same?
3. How is this a performance about two very different themes at the same time: individual difference and struggle *and* common struggle and dreams?
4. What is your story? What have you overcome? What hardships have you survived and thrived through? Is the process of surviving and thriving ever "done"?
5. Do you believe more work like this should be created and shared? What should and could be done?

Monologue Analysis

Each of the monologues below is performed during the "reality" portion of the performance, which happens toward the end.

Gerald:

We are the roses blossomed from the grasps of the asphalt
Having grown wiser by the confluences of our street knowledge
To sharing the mindset of the Fortune 500 with the savvy of business
No longer pawns but elevated to the ranks of kings and queens
While clutching to our hearts the ambition of a hustler
From players to front office we have attained the vision aligned with those who have success on their mind and passion in their hearts
We are the ones who have remixed the game and have molded it to our generation's swagger
Debonair meets concrete yet we still manage to upgrade the way business is approached
We are the sons and daughters of not only our households but our communities
Channeling the dreams of those who have come before us
Allowing ourselves to become the vessel in which their greatest aspirations can be lived



Allan:

We are..... the artists of the world
the St.Louis cap rockers
the Hemi riders and the trendsetters
the future.
the building blocks from home to home with the fearlessness of the hearts of lions.
the spray-painted murals on the sides of buildings.
This is home. These are the fixed but never processed pavements of gravel road of nitty-gritty cold streets. This is the hot summer bi-polar weather. This home sweet home is the unfit but, just right system of justice and unjust. Thiis what I call home. This is the underlining of free and unspoken segregated loop of wealth vs. poor. These are the corner stores of who knows who around town. We are the culture everyone wants to be like. Redbone, yellow bone, thick honeydew chocolate city of women are models around here. HOME IS NEEDED!!

Jabari:

The fall from grace
The type of humbleness to slow up anyone's pace
From trying to win the race
To making sure even your opponents place
What does love have to do with it
Growing up so oblivious and staying true to it
Until life unfolds
Those golden streets turn to mold
Majority of the houses aren't up to code
How do you adjust
How do you find balance when everyone's in a rush
Tipping the scale not knowing who to trust
Finding peace because in my life that's a must
I just have to thank Dream Builders
I was in a dark place that summer
As if the sun was the moon
My mind was clouded which affected my mood
But I met wonderful people
Who challenged me to be great
Who put me in a leadership role that had to be fate
My abilities put on display and I started to feel a smile on my face
Even when losing my closest cousin I was able to use my platform to display his face
So did I truly fall from grace
Or am I figuring out that evil can only take over when there isn't love to fill that empty space

**Erica:**

As life goes on and I look back to all the trials and tribulations that have occurred within my life I asked myself Would I be this determined and driven if I would've had everything handed to me? Would I be able to push myself knowing somebody else would do it for me? The answer was No because not only am I able to say I did that but now I have the knowledge and skills to pass down to a younger generation. The hustle taught me how to grind while the trials make me stronger. As I stand here today I am proud to be able to tell you the fight is not over but I am not done until I've accomplished everything I've ever dreamed of.

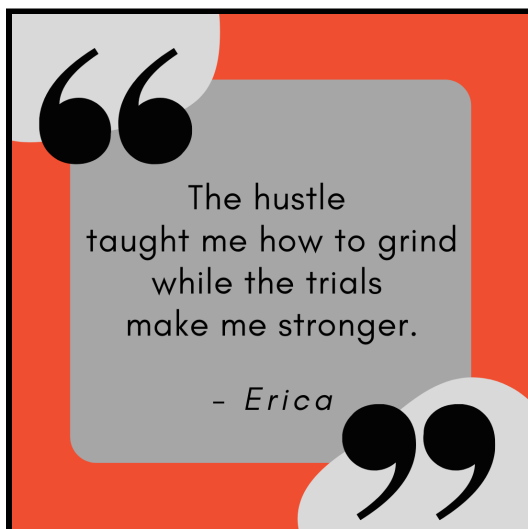
Analysis Questions

Choose one of the monologues. We suggest selecting the words that most resonate with you personally. Examine its text and also listen to the playwright's performance of its words. Then, answer these questions.

1. What literary devices can you find? What are they, and how do they contribute to the monologue's meaning?
2. How does the playwright's word choice help build the monologue's intended tone and mood?
3. What punctuation and line breaks does the author use (or not use)?
4. What are the monologue's overarching themes and lessons?
5. How did the playwright convey the intended tone and mood in his/her reading of the monologue?

Write Your Own

Using your selected monologue as an exemplary and model, write your own monologue expressing your own story.



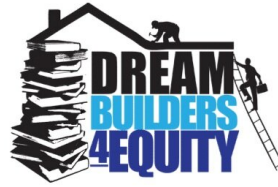
Extension Project Suggestions

- Memorize and perform the monologues as they are written, attempting to embody the characters of this performance.
- Record yourself and other students performing their monologues. Post to social media.
- Record yourself performing the original monologue written by another student, attempting to embody that person in your own portrayal.
- Create art or dance pieces to go with the original monologues created by yourself or other students. Write brief explanations of how your work is related to or inspired by the monologue.

Connect With Us

The three organizations who contributed to this performance are eager to connect to discuss our work, volunteer opportunities, or other ways to get involved.

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