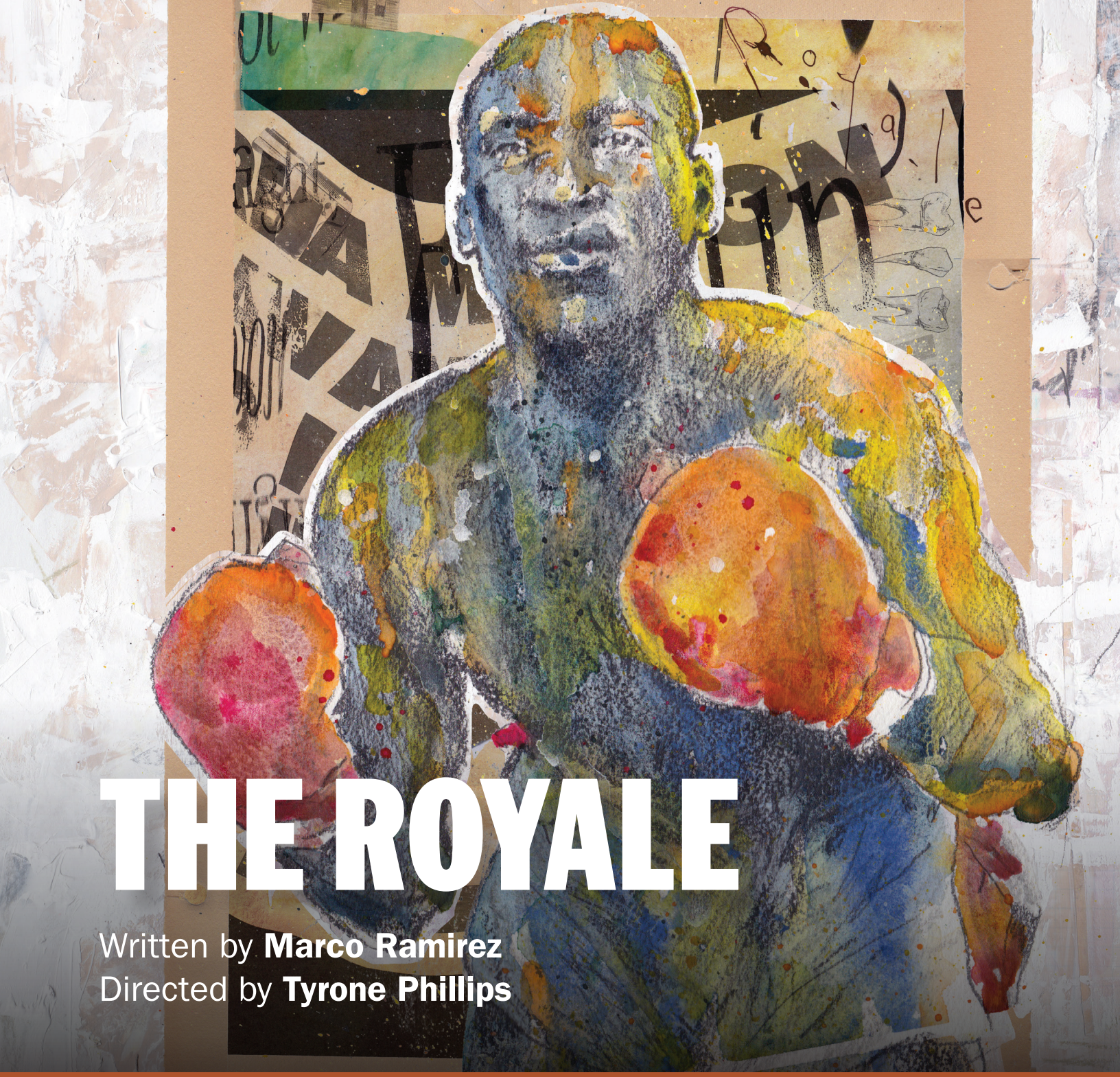


THE ROYALE

Written by **Marco Ramirez**
Directed by **Tyrone Phillips**

WT Education
Study Guide

Study Guide Contributors:
Becca Levy, Bobby Kennedy, Alondra Rios, Kenya Ann Hall

WT
WRITERS THEATRE

Dear School Partners,

Welcome to Writers Theatre's student matinee of *The Royale*!

We can't wait to bring you into playwright Marco Ramirez and Director Tyrone Phillips' rhythmic world of theatricalized boxing. This play is based on the often-overlooked history of Jack Johnson's triumphant win as the first Back heavyweight champion of the world and the devastating consequences that followed. This powerhouse of a play transforms the theatre into the arena, as audiences watch the character Jay "The Sport" Jackson boldly and unapologetically fight for his legacy. Boxing is at the forefront of this story with characters who tenaciously move forward while facing systemic and personal racism. *The Royale* forces audiences to face the reality of what Jay has to represent beyond the sport that his white counterparts can leave behind. It begs us to consider where we came from, where we're going, and what we're willing to fight for to get there.

This study guide is a resource for contextualizing the show and making real-life connections to the work of art. Within, you'll find articles, pre and post-show classroom activities, behind-the-scenes interviews, discussion questions, and a wealth of other dramaturgical materials. We hope that each of these resources will deepen you and your students' connection to *The Royale* and guide you in and out of the "arena" as you investigate the ever-present question: What will your legacy be?

Take care and enjoy the show!

WT Education

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Know Before You Go

About the Play

The Royale is an explosive, highly theatrical play with a story structured in six "rounds." The production is set inside a boxing ring and uses stylized movement and percussive rhythms in its storytelling to represent boxing matches.

The character of Jay is inspired by real-life boxer **Jack Johnson**, who became the first Black heavyweight champion in 1908—and carried his own Chicago roots.

Playwright **Marco Ramirez** is an Emmy Award-nominated writer and producer. His credits include Marvel's *Daredevil* (Netflix), Marvel's *The Defenders* (Netflix), *Sons of Anarchy* (FX), *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix), *Fear the Walking Dead* (AMC) and the musical *Buena Vista Social Club* currently on Broadway. His plays have been produced nationally and internationally, including by Lincoln Center Theater, The Kennedy Center, The Humana Festival, The Old Globe (San Diego), The Bush Theatre (London), American Theater Company (Chicago), Soulpepper (Toronto) and Center Theatre Group (LA).

Director **Tyrone Phillip**s returns to Writers Theatre, where he previously directed *The MLK Project: The Fight for Civil Rights* and was on the creative teams for *Trevor the musical, Parade,* and *The Mystery of Love and Sex*. Tyrone is the Artistic Director of Definition Theatre and the Jeff Award-winning director of Byhalia, Mississippi. Recent projects include *Fat Ham (*Definition and Goodman) and Associate Director of Steppenwolf's Tony Award-winning production of *Purpose*.

Themes & Subject Matter: Black American history (~1905-1910), athletics as a venue for progress, boxing, family and home, loyalty, choices.

Essential Questions Explored: What is the cost of change? What is strength? What responsibility do individuals have to represent their identities as a whole?

CONTENT ADVISORY

Men onstage in boxing shorts for choreographed boxing sequences.

Depiction and description of violence and death, including racialized violence and the use of stage blood.

Stylized stage boxing (stage directions: *During the "fight" sequences, both boxers should face the audience, not each other, and there is no need to swing. You'll see.*).
The director describes this as a "boxing ballet."

Mention of and assumed use of weapons (guns and knives, not depicted)

Racism and discussion of race and racism

Brief description and depiction of alcohol consumption

Strong language/swearing

Play Synopsis

The Royale takes place at some point between 1905 and 1910, in various cities in the United States.

Scene 1

"And now, the fight you came for." An announcer introduces two boxers as they step into the ring: Purley "Fresh **Fish**" Hawkins is a 6' 200lb young man making his professional fighting debut. He faces the 6'3" 210lb Negro Heavyweight Champion, **Jay** "The Sport" Jackson, who the crowd adores. Jay's trainer **Wynton** is there supporting him. Full of swagger and confidence, Jay asks Fish how many rounds he wants to make it before Jay finishes him. Fish holds his own in round one as the two trade blows. During the break between rounds, Jay's promoter **Max** points out to him the two men sitting in the front row. Jay starts to land bigger blows on Fish in round two but the younger man hangs in the fight. In round five, Fish lands a couple good hits on Jay, leaving the champion staggered. Wynton insists Jay take Fish seriously. "You so worried about winnin' this crowd, you up and forgot to win this fight." Jay rallies back and in round seven, he knocks Fish out cold.

Scene 2

In the locker room after the fight, Wynton talks to Max about how popular Jay has become, drawing more people to his fights than the reigning white heavyweight champion, Bixby. The two men in the front row were Bixby's representatives, but Max insists they were only there as a courtesy. Bixby has retired and won't accept an invitation to fight Jay. A white heavyweight champion has never fought a Black man. Although Max is meeting Bixby's reps for drinks later, he downplays expectations of it amounting to anything. Jay, however, insists Max get him a shot at the heavyweight title or he'll find a new promoter who can. Fish is summoned to the locker room and is surprised to see Jay there. Fish thinks Jay called him back just to taunt him some more like he did in the ring, but Jay instead asks Fish to be his sparring partner. Wynton tells Fish he's better



Photo by Hugo Hentoff

than each of the seventy-six other opponents Jay has defeated. Fish negotiates a raise and accepts the offer to join Jay's team. Max returns agitated after having met with Bixby's representatives. He reminds Jay that champions only come out of retirement when the financial incentive is strong, win or lose. Bixby's team said he would consider fighting Jay if he got 3 months of prep time and 90% of the fight's revenue. Max thinks it's an outrageous request that Jay should refuse, but Jay wants to accept the terms anyway. With it being such a hotly anticipated fight, Jay is passing up a fortune if he lets Bixby take home 90%. Jay won't budge and sends Max out to agree to the fight. When Jay asks Wynton if he disagrees with his decision, Wynton says no and that he would have fought Bixby for free. Alone, Jay drops his persona and shows emotion and vulnerability for the first time.

Scene 3

Jay is practicing with Fish in a gym and also participating in a press conference. Wynton coaches him in both settings. Max introduces Jay to the reporters and begins to take questions. A reporter asks Jay racist questions such as if he thinks Black people "have a predilection for fighting". Another asks Jay about his background and upbringing, with conflicting reports about where he was born and where his family is. Jay avoids answering any of the personal questions. Someone asks if Jay wants to fight Bixby solely because he's white. Jay responds "I'm comin' at him because he's The Champ, that's all. Ain't about bein' no Heavyweight Champion of the White World. It's about bein' champion, period." Another reporter asks him about the news that four men, two white and two Black, were hospitalized after a fight over whether Jackson or Bixby was better. The reporter wants to know if Jay feels remorse for what happened to those men. Jay cautiously responds that it's going to be hard for some people to accept that the best fighter in the world looks like him and not Bixby. But he insists the story shouldn't be about how he or Bixby look or where they're from, but about how they fight. Jay tries to end things there but someone yells out that four white men with guns were stopped trying to get into the press conference. This is news to Jay but he insists that he has no concern for his personal safety.

Scene 4

In the locker room, Wynton tells Fish he saw the young man gave an envelope to someone outside and is worried that Fish is conspiring against Jay. Fish is offended, saying that the envelope was payment for a gift he got Jay—and that he has out of loyalty turned down many tabloid reporters offering money for info on the star boxer. Wynton insists he was just being cautious after the contentious press conference. Fish reveals to Wynton that he found a flyer from Jay's first fight describing him as the "Pride of Creek County"—as an example of information he knew and has never told anyone. Wynton tries to compliment Fish and that he'll be in the ring someday, but Fish, still insulted, asks what's in Creek County. Before Wynton can answer, Jay storms in with Max, upset that he just learned about the men with guns. Max insists he was keeping Jay safe and didn't want any distractions in Jay's head. Max then accidentally reveals that this wasn't the first instance of men trying to bring guns in somewhere Jay is, and Wynton confirms that there have been threats made on Jay's life in several cities before this one. Jay feels betrayed and accuses Wynton of working for Max instead of him.

Scene 5

Jay is alone, practicing by himself, hitting a boxing bag to the point of exhaustion. Fish enters the locker room and shares the news that the fight with Bixby is oversold so Fish gave his ticket away to his grandaddy to see it in person. Fish plans to listen to the fight on the radio down the street at a bar. He also says that Bixby has just arrived at the venue, and Wynton and ten policemen are

checking the venue for any hidden guns. Fish then gives Jay the gift he got him, a gramophone, knowing how much Jay likes to give his opponents "a little music." Fish cranks the gramophone and the actor who plays Wynton sings a song. Jay and Fish join in singing. The song suddenly cuts off when a woman enters the locker room. It's Nina, Jay's sister. Fish leaves the two alone. Jay asks Nina if she's staying for the fight, which has sold seven thousand seats and will be broadcast live in thirty-nine states. Nina says her train home is in an hour. She shares that everyone back home is proud of Jay, and she shows him a picture of his two nephews. One of the boys is into books and a new one he ordered arrived in the mail this week with something offensive written on the cover page, directed at them for being related to Jay. Jay is horrified but Nina pushes him on whether he understands the consequences of what his fight will be. Jay insists he is safe and protected at the fight. Nina asks what about the safety of regular people when Jay beats Bixby. Jay asks her if she is telling him to lose. She replies "I don't want you to lose, I'm just afraid of what happens when you win." Jay can't accept this, saying that he didn't come all this way to lose. Nina tells him that everyone is already so proud of him, and then she leaves when Wynton enters. Jay tells him about what Nina said and wants Wynton to tell him he can and should win this fight. Wynton tells Jay about The Royale, a kind of fight he got his start in years ago. A bunch of Black men would be blindfolded in a ring and have to fight each other until only one is left standing while spectators throw money at them in the ring. The winner got a minute to fill his pockets with as much of the money on the ground as he could. Wynton won his second time at The Royale and when he emptied his pockets at home he found among the coins teeth from the other fighters. Wynton reminds Jay that a fighter is alone in that ring and whatever he chooses to do, he does it alone.



Photo by Hugo Hertoff

Scene 6

The announcer rings the bell and begins to introduce the big fight. Wynton is watching ringside, while Fish is at the bar down the street. Jay "The Sport" Jackson is introduced first and Bernard "The Champ" Bixby, 6'4" 235 lb, second. The lights however come up on Jay's opponent and we see Nina standing in place for Bixby. Round One begins and Bixby lands several good blows on Jay before Jay begins to strike back and even the playing field. During the break, Wynton implores that Jay make Bixby earn that 90%. As Jay continues to fight Bixby, he speaks to Nina about a memory he has of her. How the pharmacy in their town featured ads in its windows but the ads never depicted Black women. One time when Jay was nine years old, he found his sister had burnt off her hair trying to look like the pretty white ladies in the ads. That's why he has to fight, he wants to change things. As Jay continues to get the upper hand on Bixby, Wynton cheers him on while Nina describes the mood in cities around the country where racial violence is about to be unleashed. The fight builds to a climax and Jay knocks out Bixby. Nina starts to step out of the light but stops to tell Jay about a white man with a knife walking into a bar down the street where he sees a happy young Black man, Fish, asking the bartender to turn up the radio. Fish is stabbed and steps out of his light. Max introduces to the audience the new Heavyweight Boxing Champion, Jay "The Sport" Jackson. Wynton reminds Jay to keep his head up and Nina says to Jay "whatever happens, you did it." Jay takes a breath and then another as the claps build.

End of Play

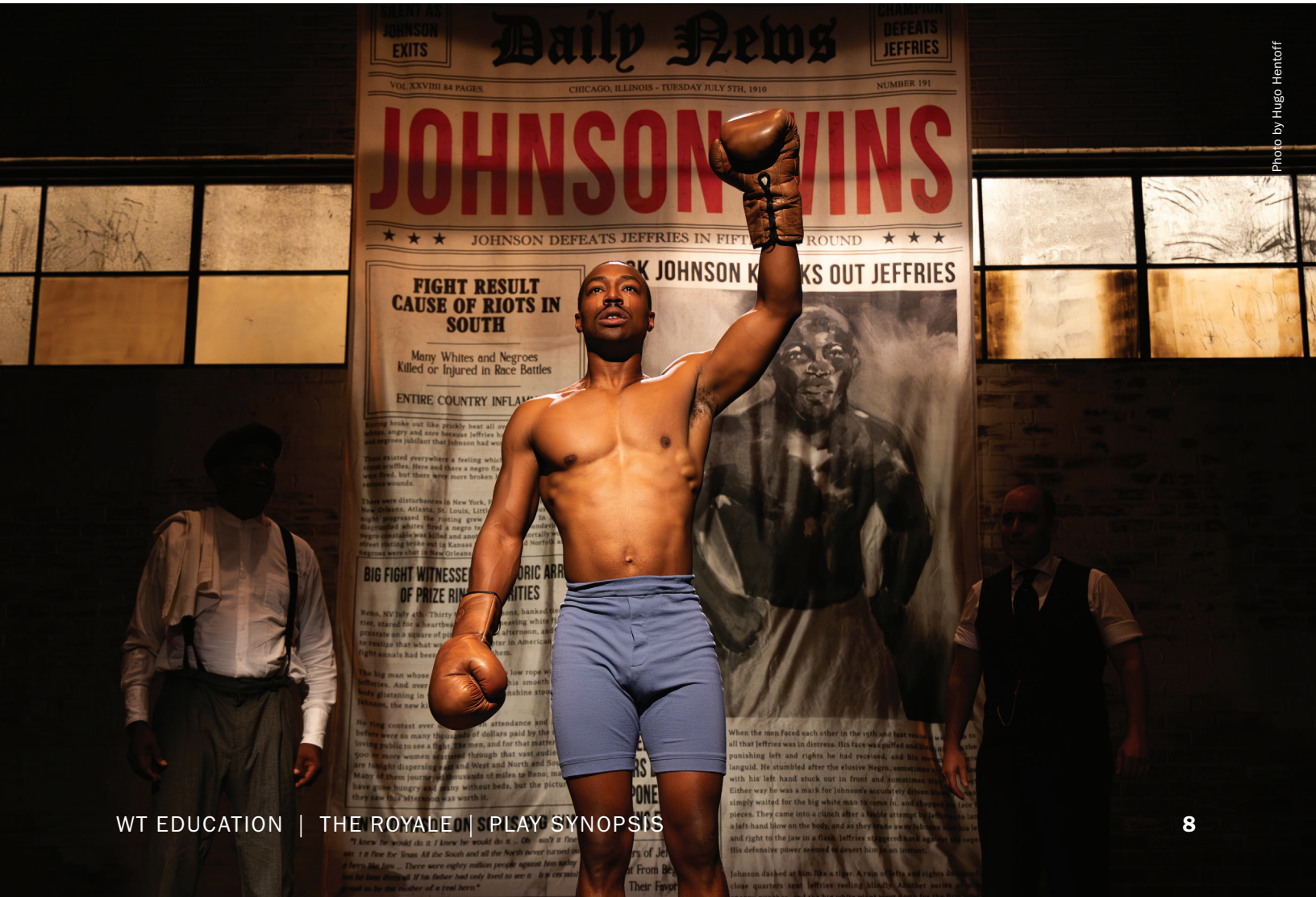


Photo by Hugo Hentoff

Meet the Players:
Cast and Creative Team

Cast



La'Tevin Alexander*
Jay



Scott Aiello*
Max



Ajax Dontavius*
Fish



James Vincent Meredith*
Wynton



AnJi White*
Nina

Understudies



Yomade Adefeso
Jay Understudy;
Fish Understudy



Kristin E. Ellis*
Nina Understudy



Joel Gelman*
Max Understudy



Frederick Paul Williams
Wynton Understudy

Rasell Holt
Movement Direction

Lauren M. Nichols^
Scenic Designer

Gregory Graham
Costume Designer

Jason Lynch^
Lighting Designer

Stephanie Farina^
Sound Designer

Kenya Ann Hall
Dramaturg

Imani M. Ross*
Stage Manager

Casting ..... Lauren Port, CSA
Casting Support ..... Katie Galetti, CSA
Casting Assistant ..... Víctor López
Assistant Director ..... Makari Robinson-McNeese
Assistant Stage Manager ..... Zoe Jennings
Deck Crew ..... Jake Snell
Wardrobe Supervisor/Crew ..... Emily Murray
Sound Board Operator ..... Isabel Gable
Light Board Operator ..... Chris Warzynski
Crew Cover ..... Elliot DePappe
Crew Cover ..... Liesl Hoeldtke
Artist ..... Nikko Washington

* Denotes member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers
** Denotes member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society
^ Denotes member of the United Artists Local 829

The Green Room:
An Interview with director, Tyrone Phillips



Tyrone Phillips is the founding Artistic Director of Chicago's Definition Theatre. Recipient of the 2022 Alumni Award for Diversity and Inclusion, he is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and has studied abroad at Shakespeare's Globe. As a first generation Jamaican-American, Tyrone is passionate about equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in the fine arts industry and has completed advanced anti-racism training to lead change in our community. Select theater credits: American Players Theatre, Cincinnati Playhouse, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Definition Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Writers Theatre, Old Globe, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis and Stage 42 (off-Broadway). He is the recipient of the Inaugural Arts Midwest Peter Capell Award for Midwestern Creativity and Entrepreneurship and proud member of SDC, SAG-AFTRA and the NAACP.

During the rehearsal process, Director Tyrone Phillips sat down with WT's director of artistic development Bobby Kennedy. Tyrone spoke about his personal connection to *The Royale*, the retelling of Jack Johnson's story, and what he hopes audiences will take away from the play.

Bobby: I want to start by asking you about your origin story. How did you come to be a director in Chicago?

Tyrone: I went to school in Niles North in Skokie. I was on the football team, and I was in practice and we took a break. They had us drinking water out of holes that were inside of a water hose. My hyper-aware self said, if my mom drove past right now and saw me drinking water out of this hose, would she be proud of me? So, I went inside the high school to find a water fountain, and I ended up in a state-of-the-art black box theater. I'll never forget it. I said, "I don't know what happens in this room, but I know I want to be a part of it." I immediately quit the football team. Sophomore year, I took my first theater workshop class. Timothy Ortman changed my life. We were in acting class one day, and he asked me about being present for a fictional character. He said, "You're not in the moment. You're not really present, Tyrone." I said, "Are you crazy? I'm not present for my everyday life and you're asking me to be present for this fake character?" Then

tears came. I had to take a break. I remember I didn't go to my next class. But that day, I woke up. I realized that if I wanted my life to go in any percentage of the direction that I wanted it to, I would have to become an active participant. I realized this theatre thing is pretty powerful, and I started to become present for my life.

Bobby: This is your third time directing this play. Knowing Writers Theatre as well as you do, what is it about *The Royale* that made you think it was such a strong fit for us?

Tyrone: I believe this play is a future classic. Truly, I think every theatre in the world should do this play at least once for their audience. It is a challenge of a play to sit through, but my favorite thing is that it highlights Jack Johnson, a hidden American figure that some people may not know about. Jack Johnson is someone who our history actually intentionally tried to hide. And so, for me, shedding light on his story is so meaningful.

Bobby: What makes the story of Jack Johnson vying for this heavyweight title one of those pivotal moments worth retelling?

Tyrone: What does it mean to be the best? And what does it take to be the best? It's a question that this play asks. That's what Jack was after. He didn't care about race at all. When he was becoming champion, it was very clear he was going to become champion. And cameras were also coming out at that time. When they realized Jack was going to become champion, they cut the cameras. So, to this day, we actually can't see him become the heavyweight champion. Fast forward, our country then banned showing the fight in the United States. So, we want to shed light on this figure who was very controversial. He's the best main character. He has great qualities and he's flawed, just like all of us. To see this man's story finally be told and to see why there are some things that happened in the aftermath of him winning, and how it truly changed our nation is important.

Bobby: It's written in the play that we're not going to see fight choreography. Instead, the boxing will be represented in a choreographed way. Why do you think the playwright made that choice?

Tyrone: This is a play with a lot of movement. It's like a boxing ballet. So, we've learned and we've incorporated some rhythms that are in the script and some that are not. To me, it feels like Marco, the playwright, is making sure our minds are more focused on strategy, not brutal force. He didn't want to highlight the rough nature of seeing someone getting punched. That's not what the play is about. The play is more so about: Are you the best? What does it take to be the best? What sacrifices do you make to be the best at your craft? And so, I think it's brilliant and beautiful that our audience can stay in the storytelling of it all and not be distracted.

Bobby: What are some discoveries you found through the first two weeks of rehearsal here with your new cast meeting the material, even though you've done this play a few times?

Tyrone: Getting off book. It's hard. And the fight scenes. Again, there's a lot of rhythm, there's a lot of cues, there's a lot of things on top of each other. And so, watching the ensemble put the page down for the first time and then look at each other in the eyes and go, “oh man,” "oh, snap,” “oh god, "oh, it's moving, right?” It's been fun for me. I'm like, “Yes, you get the play!” The challenge is now real. The other thing I'll say is that this story is also very personal. You think of a boxing play and you think you're going to come into a very masculine

OFF BOOK

is a theatre industry term used to describe when an actor has memorized their lines and can recite them without using their script.

room that is brutal the whole time. This play is also a little bit of a psychological thriller in that it asks what it means for you not only to be great, but also what happens when home comes calling again. Sometimes we leave in order to become the better version of ourselves, but what happens when a reminder from your childhood shows up at your door? Who are you then? How do you move after that?

Bobby: The script doesn't call for much in the way of scenery. In fact, it says on the first page all you need is a boxing bag, maybe some ropes, and some chalk dust. So how are you going to bring the environment of this play to life?

Tyrone: It really lives in the actors. It's one of those good plays where I believe you don't need anything to get in the way. There's no hiding in that theater. The storytelling lies in the relationships. It lies in Jack's journey. It lies in his struggle for even just being seen and recognized as a human. What I find fascinating is that Jack Johnson did not care. He was not doing it for the movement. But the play makes you say, "Well, why is the image so powerful?" Why did he feel someone else needed to see a Black heavyweight champion to know they could do that too? What is in an image? And so that, for me, is something that I'm really excited about and something we've added in this play.

Bobby: Boxing is nowhere near as popular a sport as it was 100 years ago. Why do you think it is still something that is so present in our culture? Why does it continue to fascinate playwrights, screenwriters, and artists of all kinds?

Tyrone: There's something about being in the zone that I think is something to admire. Like what it takes, physically, and the actual strength and training that you have to do to be a boxer. The strategy and the style of fighting. I think there's a fascination with our human nature. Just seeing one person show their strength over the other. I truly admire what it means to be in your best physical shape in power and strength. And again, it's a mental sport. Jack Johnson's also known as one of the first fighters who would actually talk to his opponents while they were fighting. He would mentally get in their head and that's a whole other fight.

Bobby: For sure. It's about your strength, but also strategy. Because you could be the stronger guy and lose.

Tyrone: I do love that. Learning that he was one of the first taunters to get into people's brains and break them down psychologically. And then he would hold people up, truly and say "how many rounds do you want?" He would hold people up to continue the fight. They would be ready to fall to the ground. And he'd be like, no, not yet. And so, to see that kind of strength as well, there's something about it.

Bobby: So, for one last question. Is there a message from the play from that time that is still important to tell today?

Tyrone: Yes, what is our responsibility? How do we correct wrongs from the past? Jack is one story of many that I'm sure is lost in our history, but who else have we overlooked? The other thing, to be truly personal, is that this play looks at childhood trauma. You'll learn in the play how that affects you. How that affects how you move. How you heal is a really big question in this play. He cannot become the champion until he actually faces his childhood trauma in this piece. And so, for our audience to put themselves in his shoes and think about what is that next move they're going to make in their life to declare, "I am the best at this craft." And for them to go out feeling inspired to do their very best.

World of The Play:
Jack Johnson Timeline

Written by Production Dramaturg, **Kenya Ann Hall**



Jack Johnson winning the fight over Jim Jeffries via knockout
Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-DIG-ggbain-08566]

Please note this article contains descriptions of racial violence.

The events of *The Royale* are inspired by Jack Johnson's pursuit of the heavyweight champion of the world title.

He technically had to fight for this title twice. Once against Tommy Burns, and again against Jim Jeffries to officially legitimize it. In both cases Johnson's biggest hurdle was not a lack of skill or resources, it was simply getting the white man to say "yes". Below is a timeline of key events that led to Jack Johnson winning the title of undisputed heavyweight champion of the world on July 4, 1910.

March 31, 1878

Jack Johnson was born Arthur John Johnson in Galveston, Texas.

Born to Henry and Tina "Tiny" Johnson, he was their first son, and third child of nine. His mother was a washer woman, and his father was a civil war veteran working as a janitor and occasional preacher. They lived in a small house at 808 Broadway. As a pair of formerly enslaved folks, owning property and finding a way to provide for their children was no minor feat. Johnson credits his mother for instilling in him a belief that he could do anything in the world if he set his mind to it.

Summer 1895

Jack Johnson learns to box.

Johnson first learned to box from his boss, Walter Lewis, at one of his first jobs painting carriages. He would spar with others after work for fun. One of his earliest paid fights was against a dockworker named John “Must Have It” Lee on a beach in Galveston. He won and earned a purse of $1.50 (about $60 present day).

Spring - Winter 1899

Jack Johnson is discovered.

After fighting his way through Galveston and some of the surrounding cities, Johnson decided to try his luck in the bigger market of Chicago. Though he didn’t have much luck in the city, as he was leaving he was discovered at a train station in Springfield and offered a spot in a Battle Royale. The Royale was just a sideshow to the main event scheduled that night, but there were a few heavy hitters from the Chicago fighting world in the audience and the impression he made on them allowed him to break into the industry.

Feb 3, 1903

Martin vs. Johnson.

Johnson is matched against Denver Ed Martin, the colored heavyweight champion of the world. Both were very defensive fighters, so the match lasted the full 20 rounds with no knockouts. In the end, Johnson is awarded the decision taking the title from Martin and becoming the colored heavyweight champ. However, this was not an officially recognized title and Johnson would not stop until he had his chance at the real thing. He began challenging Jim Jeffries, the current heavyweight champion of the world, shortly after.

May 2, 1905

Jim Jeffries retires with the heavyweight title claiming there were no “logical challengers” for him to fight.

Though Johnson (and many other prominent Black boxers of the time) were actively challenging him, Jeffries drew the color line and refused to fight any Black fighters. Instead, he settled down on an alfalfa farm just outside of LA. This was an unprecedented move from Jefferies, and the fighting world still needed a title holder, so promoters arranged for the two best white boxers after Jeffries to fight for it. Marvin Hart won the fight and the title. The legitimacy of this fight was disputed across the fighting world, but promoters needed the title to remain in play for business.

February 23, 1906

Hart vs. Burns.

Tommy Burns takes the heavyweight title from Marvin Hart. He openly states he will fight anyone of any color, opening the door for Johnson to finally have a go at the world title. However, Burns claimed it wouldn’t be worth it to fight Johnson unless he was guaranteed a payout of $30,000 (about $1 million present day) win, lose or draw. Most promoters saw this as a ridiculous ask and refused to fund the fight.

December 26, 1908 (Boxing Day)

Johnson vs. Burns.

Businessman turned fight promoter Hugh “Huge Deal” McIntosh decides to take on the challenge of organizing the Johnson vs. Burns fight. He gets together a group of funders to cover the $30,000 Burns demanded. Johnson is only paid $5,000. The fight is set to take place in Sydney, Australia at McIntosh’s 20,000 seat stadium. They sell out the stadium with an additional 30,000 people standing outside of it. Johnson wins effortlessly, toying with Burns through the entire fight, much to the chagrin of everyone in the audience. After 14 rounds the fight is stopped out of fear of how the majority white crowd will react to the sight of a bloodied and beaten Burns hitting the canvas. Johnson is declared the winner to a silent stadium. For the first time in history, a Black man now holds the title of heavyweight champion of the world.

April 19, 1909

Jeffries comes out of retirement and announces his challenge to Jack Johnson.

Johnson's return to North America set the country on fire. He landed in Toronto, Canada publicly claiming Hattie McClay, a white woman, as his wife. He was also, notably, without his white manager Sam Fitzpatrick. This brazen display spurred the call for a "great white hope" to knock Johnson out and return the title to its "rightful" place. After immense pressure from the sporting community (and half the country) Jeffries finally heeded the call. He promised to fight Johnson after an eight-month training tour provided Johnson didn't lose to another white competitor first.

October - November 1909

Fight details are established.

Johnson and Jeffries enter into negotiations for the parameters of the fight. Johnson largely represents himself, which was unheard of for a Black boxer to do at the time. The fight is set for July 4, 1910. It will be 45 rounds and the winner's purse will be split 75-25 (later amended to 60-40). The promoters of the fight were George Rickard and Jack Gleason. They pitched a $101,000 purse (around $4 million present day; the largest in boxing history at the time), a $10,000 bonus for each fighter and a portion of the film rights for both fighters.

July 4, 1910

Johnson vs. Jeffries: The Fight of the Century.

Tens of thousands of people poured into Reno, Nevada (which was a small mining town of 11,000 at the time) to witness the "Fight of the Century". People around the country who couldn't attend in person set up various measures to follow the fight: Prayer vigils for a Johnson victory were taking place in Kansas; students and faculty gathered in an auditorium at Tuskegee and paid for a special telegraph line for updates; bulletin boards were set up in Times Square to post fight updates; fight reenactors were set up in San Francisco; an announcer was set up in the Pekin Theater in Chicago for an audience of five thousand people with Jack Johnson's mother and sisters seated on stage as guests of honor.

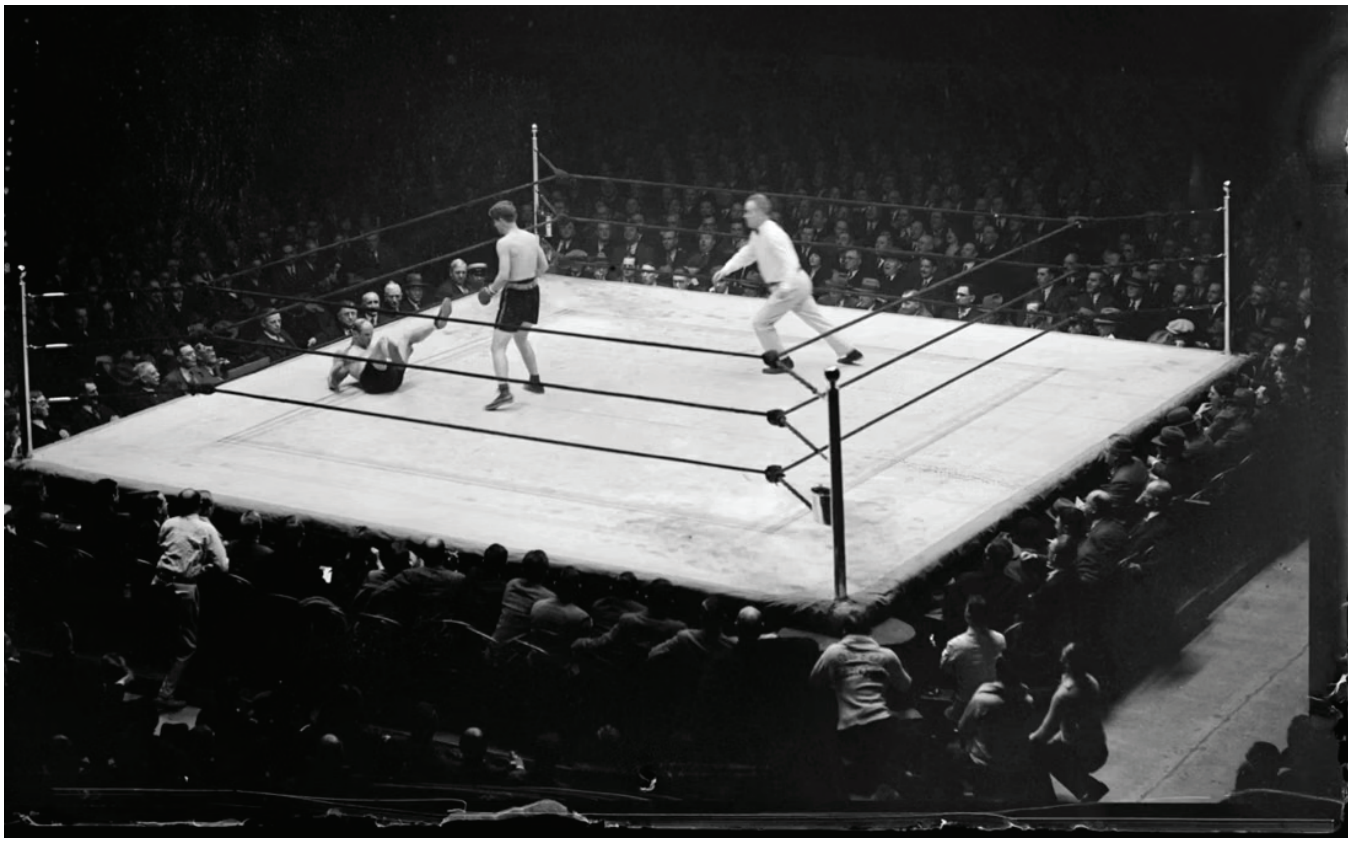
The stadium in Reno held 30,000 spectators with an additional 20,000 outside. Many prominent figures in the boxing world were in attendance. The fight lasted 15 rounds with both men getting some decent hits in. By round 11 it was clear Johnson would be the victor. In round 15, Jeffries' seconds had to lift him to his feet and throw him back in the ring for the fight to continue. Johnson hit Jeffries four more times, knocking him out and winning the fight.

Jack Johnson's victory over Jim Jeffries set off a series of celebrations and violent reactions across the country: In Chicago they gathered on Johnson's front lawn as his mother waved a poster of him from the window crying with joy; in New Orleans a Black marching band had to flee from a white mob throwing bricks at them for celebrating; Black families in a small mining town in Illinois took to the streets chanting "Hallelujah! We are a race of champions!"; a Black construction camp in Georgia was shot up by white riflemen. In the aftermath of the fight somewhere between ten and twenty Black people were killed and hundreds more were injured.

The simultaneous expressions of joy and violence were a direct demonstration of the endemic division our country is still battling today. It is difficult to conceive that something as individual as a battle of strength between two men on a 24 square foot canvas could affect the soul of a nation, but when the foundation of a society is built on the fragile narrative that one group of people deserves less than another, a single crack can break it down.

World of The Play:
Intro to Boxing

Written by Director of Artistic Development, **Bobby Kennedy**



A boxing bout at the Boston Garden, January 1930
Photo: Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection

"For a minute out there, I got this feeling I ain't had in a long time [...] Fifth round, for a minute, we was boxin', you see that?" -Jay, *The Royale*

It's hard to imagine a time when boxing—also known as pugilism, from the Latin words pugil (meaning "boxer" or "fist-fighter") and pugnus (meaning "fist")—wasn't a sport. Fighting feels intrinsic to the human condition, as does creating competition for the sake of entertainment. From ancient times to the modern age, two fighters facing off with only their fists has been the recipe for drama, thrills, tragedies and triumphs.



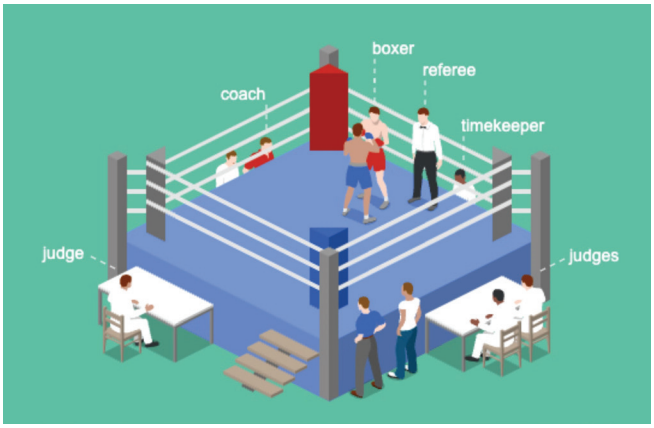
Terracotta relief of two Mesopotamian boxers, c. 2000 B.C.E. from Eshnunna, (Modern-day Tell Asram, Iraq).
Photo: Françoise Foliot, CC BY-SA 4.0 , via Wikimedia Commons

The Origins

Visual evidence of hand-to-hand combat for sport begins to appear in Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Sumerian stone reliefs in the fourth and third millennium BC. The sport spread widely through the ancient world; Homer's Iliad contains mention of a "prize fight" and a form of boxing featured in the Ancient Olympic Games in 688 BC. Hand-to-hand combat remained a popular spectator sport throughout the age of the Roman Empire before swordfighting eclipsed it in prominence during the Middle Ages.

The wearing of swords declined as the world moved toward the modern era and fistfighting for sport experienced a resurgence. In England, bare-knuckle boxing (also called prizefighting) elevated streetfighting into competitive sport in the 16th century. Initially contested without rules, champion Jack Broughton introduced a set of guidelines in 1743, designed to make the contests less deadly. The Broughton Rules were then built upon by the Marquess of Queensberry rules in 1867 which standardized many aspects of the sport, introduced the concept of weight classes, and advocated for the wearing of boxing gloves.

The English version of boxing spread to North America via immigration and became an immensely popular sport in the United States. American boxers would travel to England to fight for championship titles and soon the center of the sport moved across the Atlantic—with the last British heavyweight champion losing his title in 1899. And yet boxing was still illegal in most states and operated as part of an underground society. Fights would take place in fringe areas while law enforcement looked the other way. The lucrative nature of the matches would eventually prove too tempting with Nevada becoming the first state to legalize prizefighting in 1897.



A diagram of a boxing match and the people involved
Photo: Icograms

The Rules

Boxing matches typically still operate under the agreements formalized in the Marquess of Queensberry rules from 1867. Matches take place within a boxing ring, typically a square of 16 to 24 feet per side. Four ropes surround the fighting area at heights of 18, 30, 42 and 54 inches, held up by 5' posts at each of the corners. Fighters each have their own corner where they enter/exit the ring and retreat to during pauses in the match. Coaches and seconds have to remain outside the ropes in their fighter's own corner. A referee operates inside the ring with the fighters, ensuring that rules are followed. Ringside judges award points based on blows and other aspects of the match.

A match consists of a set number of three-minute rounds, with a minute of rest between each round. If the predetermined number of rounds is met, the

match is said to have "gone the distance" and the winner is decided based on the points awarded by the ringside judges. However, a boxer can win a match earlier in the fight if they achieve a knock-out of their opponent. When a fighter is knocked down during a match (defined as a part of one fighter's body other than their feet making contact with the floor of the ring due to the impact of the other fighter's punch), they have 10 seconds to return to their feet and continue the fight—with the referee counting up aloud from 1 to 10. If 10 seconds elapses and the downed fighter hasn't restarted the match, the other boxer is a winner by knockout (KO). A boxer can also lose by technical knock-out (TKO) if the referee rules they are unable to safely continue the match, even if they have regained their footing.

Boxers are only allowed to strike their opponents with the knuckles of a closed fist within a boxing glove. Kicking, head-butting, or striking with other parts of the body are not allowed. Blows are also not allowed below the belt, to the back or to the back of the head. If any strikes of these nature occur in a match, a referee calls a foul and the judges dock points from a fighter's score.

The Royale

The disreputable relative of boxing was the battle royal, a free-for-all match involving multiple fighters and no rules. The format spread to America as well where it became a frequent opening act for a boxing contest, particularly between 1870 to 1910. Audiences were mostly white and the fighters mostly Black men, or boys, who were exploited



Photo: The Gateway to Oklahoma History, https://gateway.okhistory.org; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

for entertainment. They were sent into the ring blindfolded and expected to fight until one man remained standing. In spite of the humiliating intentions behind the royale, Jack Johnson, and several other Black boxing champions, were able to start their careers by showcasing skill through the spectacle. By the 1910s the fights fell out of favor in the northern United States, but they continued to be staged in southern states until the 1950s. The narrator of Ralph Ellison's novel, Invisible Man, participates in a battle royal to win a college scholarship.

The Legacy

Boxing returned to the Olympics in 1908 and as the 20th century progressed, the sport's popularity grew, boosted by radio and TV broadcasts of prime matches. Boxing champions became cultural celebrities, and names like Joe Frazier, Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson became as well known as Hollywood stars. These boxers made sport into spectacle. It's only natural that artists would attempt to do the same. If you haven't seen a boxing match, odds are you've seen a film or a play or a book about one. Clifford Odets (*Golden Boy*) and Howard Sackler (*The Great White Hope*) put boxing on stage; A.J. Liebling (*The Sweet Science*), Leonard Gardner (*Fat City*), Norman Mailer (*The Fight*) and Joyce Carol Oates (*On Boxing*) described it in words; and Kirk Douglas (*Champion*), Paul Newman (*Somebody Up There Likes Me*), Sylvester Stallone (*Rocky*), Robert De Niro (*Raging Bull*), Denzel Washington (*The Hurricane*), Will Smith (*Ali*), Hillary Swank (*Million Dollar Baby*), Mark Wahlberg (*The Fighter*), and Michael B. Jordan (*Creed*) have all taken on the physical and emotional challenge of portraying contenders on screen.

Boxing's prominence in the 21st century is nowhere near what it was 100 years ago, but *The Royale*'s status as a perennial favorite with theatres proves that there's something in the spirit of this primal dueling that continues to resonate.

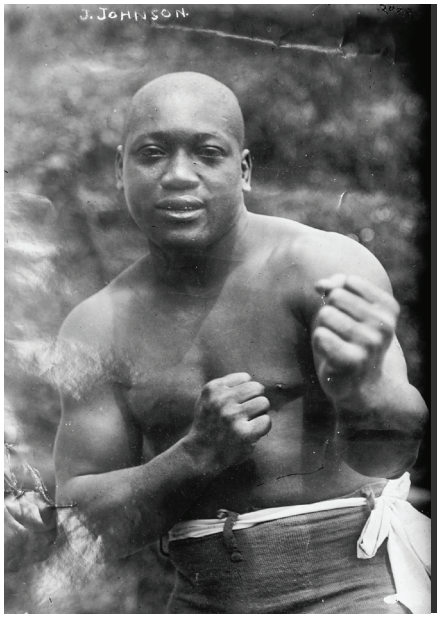


Photos by Stanton Long

World of The Play:
Sports as Venue for Change

Every day, millions of people tune in to watch their favorite team or athlete play. Throughout the past century, sports have not only provided a source of entertainment but have also shaped our culture and society. In many cases, sports have become a venue of progress and change, reflecting both a shift in cultural attitudes as well as challenging pre-existing beliefs. Let's take a look at Black athletes throughout history who were pillars of progress and change throughout history.

Athletes Who Broke Barriers



Jack Johnson
(1897-1938)

The man who inspired *The Royale*! The First Black world heavyweight boxing champion. Johnson faced James Jeffries (an undefeated white boxer) in 1910. Jeffries sole purpose of fighting Johnson was to prove "white men fight better than black men." Johnson handed Jeffries his first career loss in the 15th round of their match.

Jackie Robinson
(1947-1956)

The first black MLB player to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Despite widespread racist backlash from fans, opposing teams, and even teammates, Robinson won "Rookie of the Year" and the "National League MVP" in 1949. Robinson is known as the forefather of the American Civil Rights Movement, paving the way for other athletes of color.

Althea Gibson
(1950-1958)

The first Black tennis player to win a Grand Slam title at the French Open in 1956. She went on to conquer Wimbledon and the U.S. Nationals in 1957. She started as the first black woman to compete on the world tennis tour and ended her career racking up six Grand Slam singles titles.

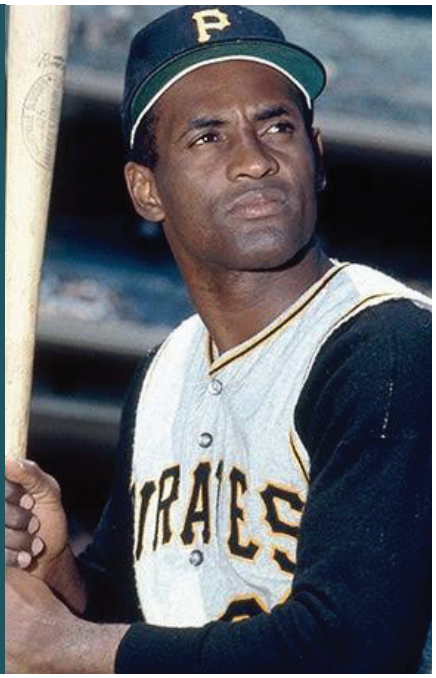


Jesse Owens
(1928-1936)

Jesse Owens, a Black American track and field athlete, went down in Olympic history by winning four gold medals in the 1936 Berlin Games. This was especially significant as Adolf Hitler used the games as a means to assert “supremacy of the Aryan race.” Owen's victory quickly disproved these racist beliefs.

Roberto Clemente
(1955-1972)

The first baseball player from Latin America to collect 3,000 hits, Hall of Famer Roberto Clemente won four batting crowns, 12 Gold Glove Awards and the 1966 National League Most Valuable Player Award during his iconic career. A 15-time All-Star, the Puerto Rico native led the Pittsburgh Pirates to two championships and was named Most Valuable Player of the 1971 World Series at the age of 37.



Athletes Using Sports as a Venue of Protest

Muhammad Ali
(1960-1981)

While Muhammad Ali made his mark by winning the gold medal in boxing during the 1960 Olympics, Ali became an iconic cultural figure when he refused to be drafted for the Vietnam War due to his religious beliefs and opposition to the war. While his stance cost him his boxing titles and a five-year prison sentence (that he ultimately did not serve), Ali is remembered as a global symbol of Black resistance and anti-war sentiment.



Tommie Smith and John Carlos
(1968)

After winning the gold and bronze medals in the 200-meter dash, Smith and Carlos silently protested systemic racism in the US by raising their gloved fist in the Black Power salute. While the gesture received scolding backlash, resulting in death threats and their suspension from the Olympic team, that act of protest remains one of the most iconic cultural moments in sports history.

Simone Biles
(2013-present)

Also known as the G.O.A.T, Simone Biles is known for being the most decorated gymnast, holding the record for the most combined World and Olympic medals. While she is a household name in gymnastics, her withdrawal from the 2020 Summer Olympics prompted huge backlash, sparking widespread discussion about mental health in sports. She has earned her way as one of the leading mental health advocates in sports and was even awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2022.



Colin Kaepernick
(2011-2016)

During the Super Bowl start for the San Francisco 49ers in 2013, Colin Kaepernick sat on the bench during the national anthem, saying, “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football, and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way.” After intense backlash, he altered his approach, choosing to kneel during the anthem instead out of respect for military members. Many other players followed suit and kneeled in solidarity. He wasn't offered another contract following his departure, and he continues to dedicate his life to activism.

Naomi Osaka
(2013-present)

By the time Naomi Osaka was 24, she was already a four-time Grand Slam champion. Osaka has also been an advocate for fighting against racial injustice, she was very outspoken in 2020 as she wore masks that featured the names of Black victims of police brutality, a tactic that supported the Black Lives Matter movement.

Questions

What other athletes can you think of who inspired progress or change?

Do you think sports are an effective avenue for changemaking? Why or why not?

The Royale is a play centered on boxing. What do you think the combination between sports and art (movie, tv, plays, or books) offers towards these themes of change?

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https://www.complex.com/sports/a/jose-martinez/25-black-athletes-changed-the-world

Classroom Activities:
Teacher Introduction

PRESHOW CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:
Foley in *The Royale* (pages 25-28)

Summary: In this activity, students will explore how rhythm, sound, and movement are valuable tools in the storytelling of *The Royale* through the use of live foley. First, they will identify moments when sound is used to punctuate the action in a scene from the play. They will then devise live sounds of their own and present a tableaux or a radio play to the class using the sounds they devised.

Objective: Students will prepare to see the production of *The Royale* by exploring how the boxing movements written in the script can be theatricalized to represent not only the physical actions, but the emotional state of the characters.

Materials: Printout of the activity pages and script, pen or pencil, optional: objects that could be used to create live foley.

Space Setup: This activity can be in any room setup where students can divide into smaller groups with room to play and also a clear space where groups can present their tableaux if they choose to.

Time: 40+ minutes

POST-SHOW CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:
Character Letters (pages 29-33)

Summary: In this activity, students will write letters from the perspective of one character in *The Royale* to another character in the play. First, they will read quotes from each character, next they will brainstorm their letter through the eyes of their chosen characters. Then they will write their letters and share them with their peers to discuss and reflect.

Objective: Students will debrief and reflect on seeing The Royale through examining character and writing letters.

Activity Materials: Printout of activity pages, pen/pencil, optional: additional paper and printout of play synopsis by scene

Space Setup: his activity can be done in any room set up where students can comfortably sit, write, and discuss.

Time: 40+ minutes

These activities address the following standards:

Illinois Theatre Arts Learning Standards

- **Anchor Standard 1:** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- **Anchor Standard 2:** Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
- **Anchor Standard 6:** Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- **Anchor Standard 7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- **Anchor Standard 8:** Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work.
- **Anchor Standard 10:** Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- **Anchor Standard 11**: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Common Core State Standards

- **CC.K-12.W.R.3** Text Types and Purposes: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences
- **CCSS.ELA.RL1** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- **CCSS.ELA.RL3** Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- **CCSS.ELA.RL4** Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- **CCSS.ELA.RI7** Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- **CCSS.ELA.SL1** Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Preshow Classroom Activity: Foley in *The Royale*

In the script notes for *The Royale*, playwright Ramirez lays down the following notes on sound and performance:

1. In production, the **SOUNDS** should be made organically, from the actors onstage.

2. **CLAPS** from the ensemble should come mostly from those not actively in the scene at hand – serving as punctuation.

3. **LAUGHTER, OOHs,** and **AAHs** can sound a little more realistic, but are still punctuation.

4. During the "fight" sequences, both boxers should face the audience, not each other, and there is no need to swing. You'll see.

5. It was helpful when actors delivering punches **STOMPED** on the floor.

6. The **RINGSIDE BELL** is live.

Foley
is the process of physically recreating everyday sound effects—like footsteps, cloth rustling, or keys jangling with objects. You can use the objects as intended (shaking your keys) or get creative.

As the playwright, Ramirez provides the directing team, sound designer, and actors with a toolbox for creating live **foley** sounds.

Step 1: Read (10 mins)

In your group, read the following excerpt from the script. Highlight any sound cue that is provided by the playwright (ex. CLAPS, ensemble OOHS, etc) and underline any action written out for the characters that have potential to add sound (ex. Left-left-right-hook, jabs, switches, punches). Please note, these sounds could be found both in the dialogue AND the stage directions, which are the maroon text in parenthesis in the excerpt.

Stage directions
Are written instructions in a script that are not spoken out loud by performers. They can indicate characters' feelings, movement on stage, or describe design elements that the audience will see or hear.

The Royale Excerpt

(DING!)

FISH
Eyes up,
Eyes,
Eyes up,

JAY
(to Fish)
You hear that crowd, boy?
(CLAP.)

FISH
Don't listen to 'im,
He's tryin' to get in your head,

JAY
Kid, I'm talkin' to you,

FISH
Knees bent, breathe easy, y
ou worked on this,

JAY
Who's name they callin'?
They callin' you?

FISH
Blood,
Focus,
JAY
Jab, jab, switch,

FISH
Land one more,
(CLAP.)

FISH
Just one,
First professional,
Make your mark,

JAY
Switch, jab, switch,
Jab,-

FISH
Just one more-

JAY
Weave 'n switch,
Breathe, come on, boy –

FISH
Make a mark –

JAY
Lamb to a slaughter, you know that?–

FISH
All these people –

JAY
Every one –

FISH
They might forget me –

JAY
Come on now –

FISH
But when he looks in the mirror –

JAY
Hah!

FISH
When he looks in the mirror –

JAY
Come on! –

FISH
He won't,-

JAY
Haha! –

FISH
He won't,-

JAY
What you doin, kid? –

FISH
GO –
(Fish FIRES – left-left-right-left hook)

ENSEMBLE
OOOOOOOOH!

MAX
Wait a second!
(Fish FIRES another – left-left-right-left hook-right hook- Holy shit-)

ENSEMBLE
OOH!

MAX
The new kid's back in it!
(Fish FIRES another – decisive punch)

ENSEMBLE
OOOH!

MAX
Landing yet another one-two-three!
(CLAP-CLAP-CLAP, CLAP-CLAP-CLAP, CLAP-CLAP-CLAP CLAP.)

Step 2: Brainstorm (10 mins)

Movement Director
collaborates with directors and performers to design the physical language, body vocabulary, and spatial relationships within a theatrical, film, fashion, or television production.

While the playwright has provided certain sound cues, such as the claps and oohs, certain actions on stage, such as punches, have the potential to be theatricalized (take a look at #4). During the rehearsal process, it is the job of the directing team, which for WT's production includes the director, assistant director, and **movement director,** the sound designer, and the actors to explore different ways these sounds can be achieved to enhance the storytelling.

In your group, brainstorm and explore ideas on what sounds can be created (either with your body or physical objects) for the lines you have UNDERLINED in the scene. What does a left hook sound like? A right one? Feel free to be creative and use any object at your disposal to create these sounds. Once you have finalized your sounds, create a "key" of all your sounds and the words that trigger them.

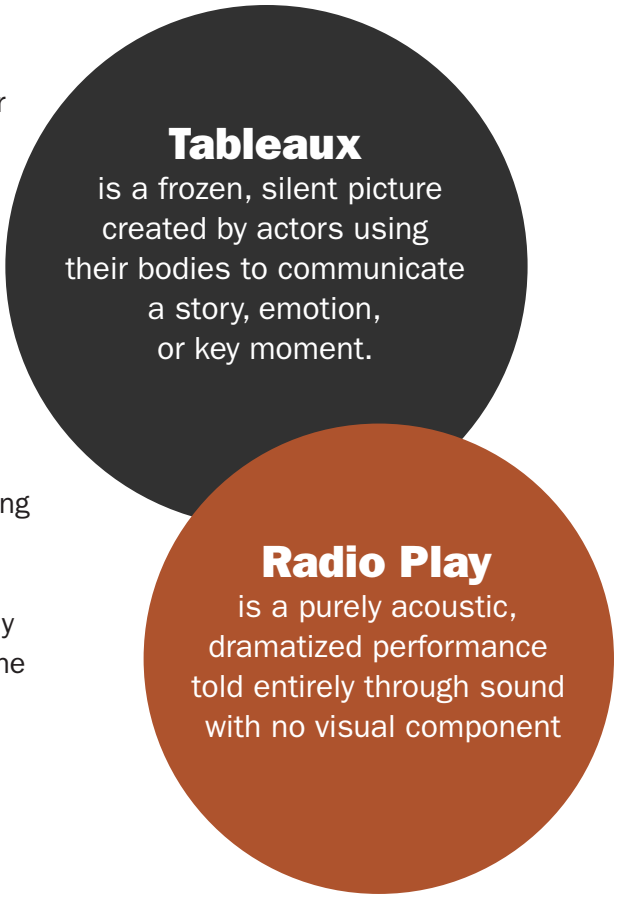
For example:
"Left hook"= Snap
"Punch" = Stomp left foot

Step 3: Rehearse (10 minutes)

Now that you have a "sound key," re-read the scene with your added sounds as well as the sound cues that the playwright provided. You have the option to either create a tableaux OR radio play.

If your group chooses to present the scene as a **tablueaux**, what might be the setup for this scene? Who is in it? Where are they in the space? Try reading the scene from these frozen tableaux with the added sound affects you have created. If you are up to it, feel free to add physical movements alongside the sounds you created to bring the scene to life.

If your group chooses to do a **radio play**, you will focus solely on honing your sound effects to ensure they are enhancing the storytelling of the scene.



Step 4: Share (10 minutes)

Present your scene to the class, one group at a time. If your group created tableaux, you can present in a clear space that will serve as your stage. If your group chose to create a radio play, you may want to invite the audience to close their eyes or put their heads down as they listen to the scene, focusing only on the audio elements.

After each group shares, listeners can ask the artist questions about their foley design and reflect on elements of the performance that stood out to them as meaningful, exciting, or creative. The group presenting may also choose to share why they made the artistic choices in their scene.

Post-Show Classroom Activity: Character Letters

In this activity, you'll choose a character from *The Royale* that you want to explore more deeply and write a letter from that person's point of view to another character in the play.

Step 1: Read

The characters in *The Royale* are unique, strong people with their own values and perspectives. Read the excerpts below from each character in the play to notice how they talk and remember what is important to them. If you're working in a group, you can take turns reading out loud (plays are written to be spoken and heard!).

JAY. The Negro Heavyweight Champion.
Ain't about bein' no Heavyweight Champion of the White World.
It's about bein' Champion, period.
...
Never took no pleasure fighting one color over another,
I'll fight anything you put in front of me,
Black, white, red or green,

WYNTON. His trainer.
I'll be there when it's done.
...
Whether you step out, whether we drag you out,
Whether that crowd cheers your name or rips you apart,
I'ma be there.
...
But whatever happens –
Whatever you do?
...
You do it alone.

NINA. His fierce big sister.
I think you're so caught up in playing David to Goliath,
In being the one fish swimming upstream,
I think you up and forgot about the rest of us,
The ones ain't as strong as you.

FISH. An amateur boxer.
That was my first real fight, you know that?
First one not in the Naval yards,

My mother was in that crowd,
And I understand this ain't choir practice –
Hell, I even understand losing –
But what you did to me in there?

MAX. A fight promoter and referee.
On my life, ain't nothin' gonna happen to you.
...
You're gonna go in there –
You're gonna knock him out in three,
Your name's gonna get written in history

Step 2: Brainstorm

Choose a character from *The Royale* that you want to write as and a character that person may want to write to. You can imagine you're writing after the events in the play have ended or choose to write as if it's the middle of the play.

First, think about the character you are writing as.

My character's name is: _____

I would use these three words or phrases to describe my character:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

My character is proud of:

_____

My character values this above all else:

_____

_____

Now, think about the character you are writing to.

I am writing to:

I would use these three words or phrases to describe the character I'm writing to:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

The character I'm writing to values this above all else:

Finally, consider the relationship between those two characters. From your chosen character's perspective, fill out some or all of the following prompts:

I agree with you about:

I disagree with you about:

A hope I have for you is:

A question I have for you is:

A moment I want to share with you is:

One thing I wish for you to know is:

Step 3: Letter Writing

Using your brainstorm above and experience of watching *The Royale*, write your letter from the perspective of one character in the play to another. Use the events in the play and what other circumstances you imagine would be true for these characters. If you need a reminder of events from the play, feel free to look back to the summary earlier in the study guide.

As you write, consider:

- How does this character speak? What words do they use?
- How does this character feel? How does that influence what they say in their letter?
- Why are they writing this letter? What does this character want to share with or gain from the person they are writing to?

Step 4: Share And Reflect

Choose a partner and read your letters out loud to each other or students may choose to read their letter to the class. If it's possible to choose someone in your class who wrote a letter to the character you wrote as and vice-versa, you can discuss how it felt to listen from the perspective of your character.

After listening to a peer read their letter, discuss:

- What sticks out in your memory from their letter? Were there any particularly meaningful or powerful moments?
- What new insights did you learn about the character they wrote as?
- What new insights did you learn about the character they addressed in their letter?
- What questions do you have for the writer or the character?







Photos by Stanton Long



Discussion Questions:

1. *The Royale* is a fictional story based on the career of Jack Johnson, the first Black boxer to hold the heavyweight title. Did you know anything about Jack Johnson before watching this play? If you didn't, why don't you think his story is more well known?

2. The current heavyweight champion, Bixby, only agrees to fight Jay in exchange for 90% of the purse, win or lose. Max, Jay's promoter, tells him it's a terrible deal and the sports world won't take him seriously if he accepts the lopsided terms. Jay agrees anyway. Why do you think Jay accepts the terms? Was it the right decision?

3. Boxing in *The Royale* is told through expressive choreography, rhythmic verbalizations, and a live score consisting of stomps and claps—instead of traditional fight choreography. Playwright Marco Ramirez explained this choice by saying "I wanted to remove the physical impact of the sport and focus on its emotional impact." What was your experience watching these violent encounters told without any punches landing?

4. Jay repeatedly dodges questions about his personal background, who his family is and where they're from, not just to the public but also to Fish. Why do you think he is so insistent on keeping his background private?

5. During a press conference, Jay says "I think you take some people and you tell 'em there's the slightest chance that the toughest man in the world don't look like Champ Bixby? That's tellin' 'em the sky is red, forwards is backwards, and Santa Claus isn't real." Can you think of any other similar realizations you've seen people have a very hard time accepting? Why do you think that is?

6. Wyton tells Jay about having fought in a royale (also known as a battle royal).These free-for-all fights with no rules exploited mostly Black men and boys for entertainment. Why do you think the play is titled after these disreputable contests?

7. During the final fight for the championship title, Nina appears in the ring instead of Bixby. Why do you think Jay was seeing her instead of his opponent? What impact did seeing her in the ring have on you while watching the final scene?

8. Jay insists that he's striving for this title to change things and for Black people to have a chance at being considered the best, but Nina fears what the consequences of winning the fight will be for regular people. Was Jay right to pursue this goal despite the real consequences? What are the costs of making change happen even today?

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