


Sometime Child

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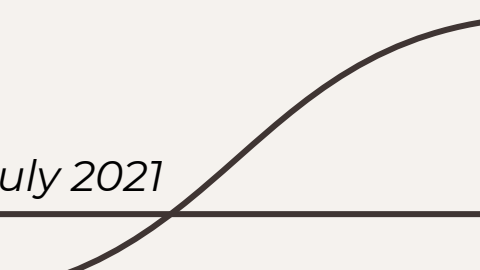


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First Impressions

First Impressions...



Education

Education is the key to success, but who has access to it?



The Power of Voice

Speech is what you say, voice is how you say it.



Mutual Aid

Active outreach is life changing.



Systemic Racism

“Picking yourself up by the bootstraps” is harder than it sounds.



Poverty

It is near impossible to escape poverty without outside help.



Transformation

Clarence becomes a “somebody.”

Dramatic Questions...



**“Is it possible to rise
above systems of
oppression?”**



**“How does one’s voice
reflect their inner life?”**



**“Is it better to help one
person in a big way, or to
help many people in a
small way?”**



**“Is everyone born with the
same level of
intelligence?”**

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Strengths

Modern-Day Pygmalion

- ❑ It's difficult to create a work that is an adaptation (or even just inspired by) a classic without seeming derivative or cliché!
 - ❑ *Sometime Child* offers a fresh and timely take on a well-known tale of transformation
- ❑ *Sometime Child* even makes the Henry Higgins figure (John) a more sympathetic and likeable character, which deviates from the typical archetype
- ❑ **An idea:** deep dive other works inspired by Pygmalion and notice how they use character-focused conflict and tension to drive the plot forward. When (and how) does the student push back against the teacher? How does the teacher earn the student's trust? What is the end result?
 - ❑ [My Fair Lady](#)
 - ❑ [Ruby Sparks](#)
 - ❑ [The Shape of Things](#)
 - ❑ [Pretty Woman](#)

Pace

- ❑ The action moves at a refreshingly quick pace, especially at the beginning
 - ❑ This is achieved by jumping back and forth between the office to the street, then the hospital to the street
- ❑ Plot is so well-structured, it'll be easy to keep the pace up with some edits
- ❑ **Start late, get out early** to keep the pace moving quickly
 - ❑ Ex. Begin the GED score scene with John, Maggie, and Clarence already at the computer

Dramatic Foils

- ❑ *“Foil is a literary device designed to illustrate or reveal information, traits, values, or motivations of one character through the comparison and contrast of another character. A literary foil character serves the purpose of drawing attention to the qualities of another character, frequently the protagonist. This is effective as a means of developing a deeper understanding of a character by emphasizing their strengths and weaknesses.” - LiteraryDevices.net*
 - ❑ Ex. George vs. Lenny, Hamlet vs. Laertes, Frankenstein vs. Monster
- ❑ Clarence vs. Bobbie
 - ❑ Despite being raised in the same neighborhood, going to the same school, and having neglectful/absent parents, they end up on different paths. **Why?**

Breaking the Fourth Wall

- ❑ This can be a very effective tool in helping the audience feel closer to the characters
 - ❑ Especially heartbreaking when Clarence compares himself to Icarus
- ❑ What are the **“rules” you’ve created** about who can talk to the audience? Is it only John? Is it John and Clarence? John, Clarence, and Bobbie? What are they trying to get from the audience when they break the fourth wall?
 - ❑ Ex. Fleabag
- ❑ *Who* is the narrator? Is it a character we meet in the play? Is it an independent Chorus?

Mutual Aid vs. Charity

- ❑ “I’ve given a lot of money to help some disadvantaged kids... never met one face to face. This is a chance for me to get to know one of these kids... get to understand where they come from.” p. 23
- ❑ Mutual aid is a very timely topic, and one which I think you can **lean further into**
 - ❑ Mentorship as modern-day apprenticeship
 - ❑ Pulling people up the ladder
 - ❑ Using one’s privilege as a platform
- ❑ In the end, Clarence gets the chance to uplift Bobbie, completing the cycle
 - ❑ Who will Bobbie uplift?



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Notes



Show, Don't Tell!

- ❑ If you can reveal something with **action** rather than with **words**, do it!
- ❑ **Avoid recapping** action that the audience has already watched.
 - ❑ Ex. John's monologue to the judge about Clarence
- ❑ Avoid anything that sounds too much like **obvious exposition**. Allow it to be an IV drip of information.
 - ❑ Ex. Bobbie and Clarence telling each other about their absent parents in the first scene--they already know this about each other
- ❑ **Trust the audience** will be able to draw conclusions.
 - ❑ Ex. The audience doesn't need to know *all* the information about GED scoring--it's much more interesting to *watch* the characters' responses to the scores

The Concept of “Proper English”

- ❑ **African American Vernacular English (AAVE)** is recognized by linguists as a full-fledged dialect of American English, with its own grammatical rules and syntax
 - ❑ AAVE is not “incorrect” English; rather, it is its own dialect
- ❑ Many Black Americans find success and empowerment in the ability to **code-switch** based on their given audience
 - ❑ It is a conscious choice, rather than an erasure of their culture and history
- ❑ This could create some really insightful conversation between Clarence and John about **why Standard American English (“white” English) is seen as superior to AAVE**

Clarence's Agency

- ❑ Though Clarence's initial low-self esteem is integral to his character development, we should see his sense of **power and agency** develop
 - ❑ Avoid him seeming passive
 - ❑ What makes Clarence **decide** to go against his conscience and help Bobbie with the robbery? Is there something specific that Bobbie has that Clarence is envious of?
 - ❑ Why does Clarence **decide** to open up to John?
 - ❑ Give Clarence the chance to **voice his own dreams and ambitions**--does he *want* to be a lawyer like John? Does he *want* to learn how to talk like John?
 - ❑ Give Clarence the opportunity to consent to this experiment and say, "I want to learn."
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John's Inner Life

- ❑ The audience knows so little about John!
 - ❑ Does he have a wife? Kids? What was his childhood really like?
- ❑ How did John get to where he is? Did someone mentor him?
- ❑ What does he see in Clarence that makes him want to help?
- ❑ Most importantly: What does **John learn from Clarence?**

Maggie's Purpose

- ❑ Does Maggie have to be white?
 - ❑ Maggie being a person of color could **act as a bridge** between Clarence and John
 - ❑ Calling John out on any problematic behavior, while also challenging and uplifting Clarence as a fellow member of the global majority
 - ❑ Mitigate the white savior complex
 - ❑ Maybe the whistle is Maggie's idea instead of John's!
 - ❑ What if Maggie, being a former English teacher, broadens Clarence's mind about how hard teachers have to work? Clarence then, in turn, broadens Bobbie's mind?
 - ❑ Allow Clarence to discover how "the system" is broken and fails so many
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Bobbie's Motivations

- ❑ Though Bobbie and Clarence grew up in similar circumstances, what put **Bobbie on the path toward violence and destruction?** Was there abuse in his household? Drugs?
 - ❑ What makes Bobbie attack John so brutally? Does John say something that triggers Bobbie? He mugs people all the time--what makes this different than a normal mugging for him?
 - ❑ Why is Bobbie so worried about John recognizing him? Do they know each other from somewhere? Does Bobbie have some sort of recognizable tattoo or feature?
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Nit-picky things

- ❑ What are the specifics of the setting? What year is it? What time of year? What neighborhood? What block?
- ❑ In the conversations with Mr. and Mrs. Jackson, it's established that the people on the other side of the phone can't be heard by the audience; however, in future scenes (library lady, etc.) we hear the voiceover. Suggestion: make it consistently a one-sided conversation!
- ❑ Does John carry his putter to/from the office every day? He wouldn't be playing golf outside in December/January. Has Bobbie noticed him walking by with his putter and made John a "mark," assuming he's wealthy because he plays golf? Are Bobbie and Clarence specifically targeting John in that attack?
- ❑ "The Docs say I'll heal ok but that I may never get my memory back after what happened to me."
p. 18
 - ❑ This felt confusing and led me to believe that John had some sort of long-term amnesia
- ❑ "You have been working here for two years..." p. 83
 - ❑ I'd love to have more of a sense of the passage of time leading up to this



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Resources



Recommended Reading

Articles:

- [History and Overview of African American Vernacular English](#)
- [“The Cost of Code-Switching” \(Harvard Business Review\)](#)

Books:

- [*Talking Black, Talking Back* by John McWhorter](#)

Plays:

- [*Sweat* by Lynn Nottage](#)
 - [*Pipeline* by Dominique Morisseau](#)
 - [*Topdog/Underdog* by Suzan-Lori Parks](#)
 - [*How I Learned to Drive* by Paula Vogel](#)
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Exercises

- ❑ Sit in a public place, eavesdrop on a conversation, and transcribe *exactly* how you hear people speaking.
 - ❑ Alternatively, transcribe a podcast! Especially if you can find a podcast that centers around conversations among Black men.
- ❑ Write out the plot of your play as if it's a story. Between every event of the play, the transition word should be either "THEREFORE" or "BUT." If the transition word is "THEN" or "NEXT," the event isn't justified enough yet!
 - ❑ Ex. Romeo's beloved becomes a nun and he is depressed. THEREFORE his friends decide to take him to a ball, BUT it's at the enemy Lord Capulet's house. THEREFORE he meets Juliet, BUT discovers she's a Capulet...
- ❑ Pixar storyline:
 - ❑ Once upon a time there was a ____.
 - ❑ Every day, they ____.
 - ❑ Until one day, ____.
 - ❑ Because of that ____, because of that ____, because of that ____.
 - ❑ Until finally they learn ____ and are able to ____.