

STUDY GUIDE

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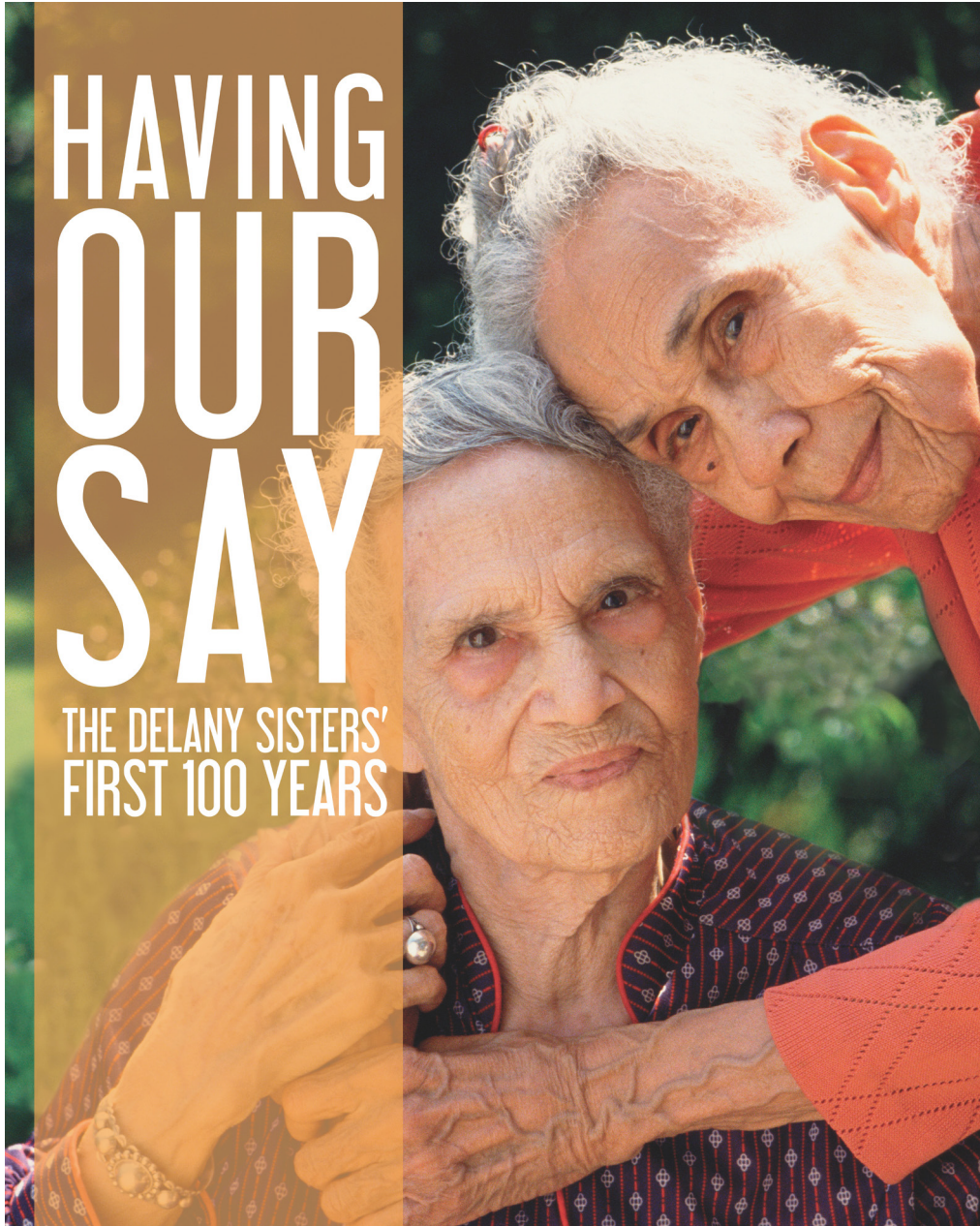
Watkinson School

Wells Fargo

Michael S. Wilder

HAVING OUR SAY

THE DELANY SISTERS' FIRST 100 YEARS



BY
EMILY MANN
ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK BY
SARAH L. DELANY AND A. ELIZABETH DELANY
WITH AMY HILL HEARTH
DIRECTED BY
JADE KING CARROLL

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STUDY GUIDE OBJECTIVES

This study guide serves as a classroom tool for teachers and students, and addresses the following Common Core Standards and Connecticut State Arts Standards:

COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Reading Literature: *Key Ideas and Details*

- **Grades 11-12:** Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **Grades 11-12:** Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop related elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

Reading Literature: *Craft and Structure*

- **Grades 9-10:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
- **Grades 11-12:** Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

Reading Literature: *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

- **Grade 8:** Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.
- **Grades 11-12:** Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

InterACT SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

- **HS Proficient TH:Cr3.1.I. b.** Explore physical, vocal and physiological choices to develop a performance that is believable, authentic, and relevant to a drama/theatre work.
- **HS Advanced TH:Re9.1.III. a.** Research and synthesize cultural and historical information related to a drama/theatre work to support or evaluate artistic choices.
- **HS Advanced TH:Re9.1.III. c.** Compare and debate the connection between a drama/theatre work and contemporary issues that may impact audiences.
- **HS Proficient TH:Cn11.2.I. a.** Research how other theatre artists apply creative processes to tell stories in a devised or scripted drama/theatre work, using theatre research methods.
- **HS Proficient TH:Cn11.2.I. b.** Use basic theatre research methods to better understand the social and cultural background of a drama/theatre work.

GUIDELINES FOR ATTENDING THE THEATRE

Attending live theatre is a unique experience with many valuable educational and social benefits. To ensure that all audience members are able to enjoy the performance, please take a few minutes to discuss the following audience etiquette topics with your students before you come to Hartford Stage.

- How is attending the theatre similar to and different from going to the movies? What behaviors are and are not appropriate when seeing a play? Why?
 - › Remind students that because the performance is live, the audience can affect what kind of performance the actors give. No two audiences are exactly the same and no two performances are exactly the same—this is part of what makes theatre so special! Students' behavior should reflect the level of performance they wish to see.
- Theatre should be an enjoyable experience for the audience. Audience members are more than welcome to applaud when appropriate and laugh at the funny moments. Talking and calling out during the performance, however, are not allowed. Why might this be?
 - › Be sure to mention that not only would the people seated around them be able to hear their conversation, but the actors on stage could hear them, too. Theatres are constructed to carry sound efficiently!
- Any noise or light can be a distraction, so please remind students to make sure their cell phones are turned off (or better yet, left at home or at school!). Texting, photography, and video recording are prohibited. Food and gum should not be taken into the theatre.
- Students should sit with their group as seated by the Front of House staff and should not leave their seats once the performance has begun. If possible, restrooms should be used only during intermission.

Having Our Say Through Time and Genre

By Andy Germuga

The story of the Delany sisters is one that demands to be told, having been wildly successful in multiple media for over two decades. The words of Sadie and Bessie Delany first came to prominence in September of 1991, when they were featured in *The New York Times*, leading to interest in their story and a book deal. The oral history book *Having Our Say* was first published on September 19, 1993, and it then stayed on *The New York Times* bestseller list for 113 weeks.

Next, the story was adapted for the stage. Adapted and directed by Emily Mann, *Having Our Say* premiered at the McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, New Jersey, where Mann is the Artistic Director, in February of 1995. The production starred Mary Alice and Gloria Foster and transferred to Broadway at the Booth Theatre, where it opened on April 6, 1995. The show was nominated for three Tony Awards and ran for nine months, closing in December of 1995, having made a profit. The actual Delany sisters were able to attend that production in May of 1995.

Their story went on to be adapted for television in 1999 by Mann, directed by Lynne Littman and starring Diahann Carroll and Ruby Dee as Sadie and Bessie, along with Amy Madigan as Amy Hill Hearth, the co-author of the original oral history. Also appearing in the movie were Lisa Arrindell Anderson and Audra McDonald as younger versions of the sisters. The movie aired on CBS, reaching over 11.7 million viewers, and would go on to win a prestigious Peabody Award, as well as a Writer's Guild Award nomination for Mann.

The play has also played in numerous productions in regional theatres across the country. This includes a new production directed by Mann at its original home, the McCarter, in 2009. Speaking about what had changed, Mann said mounting the play again after the sisters had passed away "... makes it like a new play: looking at who they are, and what they have contributed in a way that has to do with memory in a different way. Now, we're remembering them as they remembered their lives and the lives of their relatives and ancestors. It takes on a kind of mystical quality..." (Mann). And now, it's being mounted here in Connecticut, in a co-production between New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre and Hartford Stage, where audiences will once again have the chance to hear the Delany sisters' unforgettable story.



Olivia Cole and Brenda Pressley in *Having Our Say*.

1889

Sarah Louise "Sadie" Delany is born on September 18th.

Benjamin Harrison is the 23rd President of the United States.

It has been 24 years since the end of the Civil War.

There are 42 states in the Union.

1891

Annie Elizabeth "Bessie" Delany is born on September 3rd.

Streetcars in the South are segregated for the first time.

There are 112 recorded lynchings.

1896

Sadie is 7. Bessie is 5.

Plessy v. Ferguson: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that "separate but equal" public accommodations are legal, paving the way for Jim Crow laws.

1900

Sadie is 11. Bessie is 9.

W.E.B. DuBois proclaims "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line."

Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* is published.

James Weldon Johnson writes "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

Important Historical Figures in *Having Our Say*

Reprinted by permission of McCarter Theatre Center

MARIAN ANDERSON (1897-1993) was a renowned contralto who performed in major American and European venues between 1925 and 1965, including the Metropolitan Opera House as its first black performer. When the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to have her sing at Constitution Hall in 1939, she performed to great acclaim at the Lincoln Memorial.

JIMMY CARTER (b. 1924) served as the 39th President of the U.S. from 1974-1981, and received the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize for his advancement of international human rights. Although the end of his term was marred by the taking of hostages in Iran, Carter managed to create the Department of Energy and the Department of Education, establish a national energy policy, reform civil service, protect national parks, and orchestrate the Camp David Accords.

ANNA J. COOPER (1858-1964) was an early African-American feminist and author of *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South*. An alumna of St. Augustine's College, she graduated from Oberlin and received a doctorate from the University of Paris. Bessie (Annie Elizabeth) was named after her.

W.E.B. DU BOIS (1868-1963) was a civil rights activist, leader, Pan-Africanist, scholar, sociologist, educator, historian, writer, poet, editor of *Crisis* magazine, and a founder of the NAACP. Less assimilation-oriented and more radical than his contemporary Booker T. Washington, he fought against myths of racial inferiority and promoted equal treatment of African-Americans.

"FATHER DIVINE" (b. GEORGE BAKER, 1876-1965) was a major African-American religious figure in the 1930s who advocated the racial equality of his primarily black followers. Although some call Baker's International Peace Mission a cult (he was worshipped as God), the organization is often touted as a precursor of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

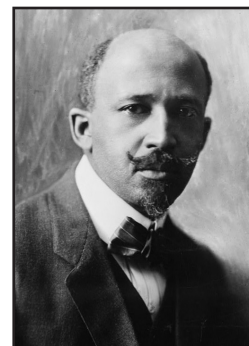
E. FRANKLIN FRAZIER (1894-1962) was a sociologist who specialized in the study of the black family and the black middle class. His work focused on the global effects of racism, the character of the African-American middle class, the urban socialization of African-American youth, and in general, the social problems affecting the African-American community. He served as a professor at a variety of colleges and universities, and worked for a number of U.S. sociological institutions.

ANITA HILL (b. 1956) is a professor of social policy, law, and women's studies at Brandeis University and a former coworker of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Department of Education. During his Senate confirmation hearings, Hill accused Thomas of making inappropriate sexual statements but Thomas ultimately received confirmation by a 52-48 vote.

ALBERTA HUNTER (1895-1984) was a jazz and blues singer, songwriter, and actress who reached the peak of her career during the Harlem Renaissance. In the 1950s, she enrolled in nursing school and entered the medical profession, but returned to singing for the latter part of her life.



Marian Anderson sings at the dedication of a mural commemorating her performance at the Lincoln Memorial. Photo by Gordon Parks, 1943.



Portrait of W.E.B. Du Bois. Photo by Cornelius M. Battey, 1918.



Robert Kennedy as Attorney General testifies in a senate subcommittee hearing on crime. Photo by Warren K. Leffler, 1963.

1903

The first powered airplane is flown by the Wright brothers. Ford Motor Company is founded.

1910

Sadie is 21. Bessie is 19.

Halley's Comet makes its first 20th century appearance. The NAACP is incorporated. Three quarters of the population of New York City consists of first- and second-generation immigrants.

1912

Sadie is 23. Bessie is 21.

Woodrow Wilson is elected president. Federal employee facilities are segregated; New York City theaters are desegregated. The Titanic sinks on its maiden voyage.

1917

Bessie (26) follows Sadie (28) to Harlem.

The U.S. enters World War I. Marcus Garvey emerges as a strong voice for black nationalism.

ROBERT KENNEDY (1925-1968) served as Attorney General, adviser to his brother John F. Kennedy, and Democratic Senator, and was assassinated during his presidential campaign. He was a supporter of the Civil Rights Movement, and lobbied for African-American rights.



Portrait of actor, baritone, and activist Paul Robeson. Photo by Gordon Parks, 1942.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. (1929-1968) was a clergyman, activist, and leader in the Civil Rights Movement. Before his assassination, he led the Montgomery Bus Boycott, helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and received the Nobel Peace Prize. In his famous "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963, King painted a picture of his goal: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

ROSA PARKS (1913-2005) became a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement in 1955 when she refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama. She thus initiated the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a movement organized in part by Martin Luther King, Jr., which ultimately led to the Supreme Court's outlawing of segregated public transport.

ADAM CLAYTON POWELL, JR. (1908-1972) was a Harlem Baptist pastor, the first African-American congressman, and an advocate for African-American civil rights. A representative of Harlem, he fought segregation and discrimination on the Hill until 1970, and became chairman of the Education and Labor Committee in 1961.



Portrait of Eleanor Roosevelt, 1933.

PAUL ROBESON (1898-1976) was an accomplished athlete, actor, singer, cultural scholar, author, and political activist. A native of Princeton, he broke down color barriers in the theatre, and played many serious classical roles to great acclaim. His career foundered severely at the hands of Senator Joseph McCarthy, who punished him for his political activism and social justice work.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT (1884-1962) was First Lady from 1933 to 1945, supporting her husband's New Deal policies, civil rights reform, and women's rights.

HARRY TRUMAN (1884-1972) served as president of the United States from 1945-1953. He ordered the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, signed the charter of the United Nations, established the Truman Doctrine to aid Turkey and Greece, introduced the Marshall Plan to bolster the European post-war economy, and organized NATO.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON (1856-1915) was an educator, orator, author, founder of the Tuskegee Institute, and leader in the African-American community throughout his life. A much more moderate reformer than some of his contemporaries, Washington believed that education and work, rather than legal and political action, were key to elevating the status of African-Americans.



A stereograph card of Booker T. Washington, circa 1906.

WALTER WHITE (1893-1955) served as executive secretary of the NAACP from 1931 to 1955. During his tenure, he fought lynching, segregation, discriminatory voting practices, and racial discrimination; helped bring about the founding of a federal civil rights commission; and even contributed to the Harlem Renaissance as a writer.

MALCOLM X (b. MALCOLM LITTLE, 1925-1965) was a radical African-American activist, and leader and national spokesperson for the Nation of Islam for almost twelve years before he renounced his membership in 1964. Before his assassination, he traveled to Mecca and founded both Muslim Mosque, Inc. and the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

1918

Sadie (29) graduates from Pratt Institute and continues her education at Columbia University.

1920

Sadie (31) graduates from Columbia Teachers College and takes a teaching job in Harlem.

American women win the right to vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment.

1922

Sadie is 33. Bessie is 31.

The Lincoln Memorial is dedicated in a segregated ceremony.

1923

Bessie (32) graduates from Columbia Dental School.

Garret Morgan, an African-American inventor, receives a patent for the automatic traffic light.

A Conversation with Emily Mann: Director/Adaptor

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Original adaptor Emily Mann.

*In 2009, this interview was conducted with McCarter Theatre Center Artistic Director, Emily Mann, during the revival production of **Having Our Say** at the McCarter in Princeton, NJ. Emily Mann adapted the book for the stage and directed the original production in 1995.*

Q: The book of *Having Our Say* is filled with wonderful anecdotes and stories about the Delany sisters’ lives. Did you find it difficult to pick and choose which sections you would include in the stage version?

A: It was a very painful process. When I first started, it must have been about five or six hours long. There was so much I wanted to include, and I knew it could only be a third as long as it was. So it was a constant battle of distilling and cutting and shaping to find the essential form.

Q: Were there certain elements you felt were important to include?

A: Oh, absolutely. There are a number of very important elements. One, of course, is the whole question about tracing African-American history through the lives of the sisters and the memories of their parents so that you get a very long sweep of personal history. Secondly, we’re looking at American women facing the barriers of discrimination against women. These are women whose father was born a slave, and then they become some of the first educated women, black or white, in this country. They went on to become often the first in their fields to do what they were doing. They were facing both the racial and the gender obstacles. That was something I wanted to make sure was in there loud and clear because it was a part of their daily lives. Then, in terms of sticking with the social and political level, I wanted to include their memories of their parents. So we go back on their mother’s side to the War of 1812.

We tend to have very unsophisticated and almost clichéd visions and images of what slavery days were about. The Delany sisters break these preconceived ideas. They challenge all of us to listen again from a very unique perspective about what happened. And because they were particularly fortunate, it puts into high relief the devastating effects that slavery and Emancipation had on other families. The Delany family had the opportunity before Emancipation to be educated — that was a big advantage. Also, their family was together. They hadn’t been abused. Those things allowed them to go quickly into the professional classes. There were many intelligent and ambitious men and women who had three strikes against them when they started.

Reconstruction was an exciting time. Jim Crow destroyed the opportunities presented during those years just after the end of the Civil War. The Delanys experience both the excitement and “the day everything changed” (the misery of Jim Crow).

Beyond the political and the social, I just cared so much about them — humanly and spiritually.

1925

Sadie (36) finishes her Master's Degree in Education at Columbia. Bessie (34) opens her dental practice.

The "Scopes Monkey Trial" ends in the conviction of John Scopes for teaching evolution in public schools.

1929

Sadie is 40. Bessie is 38.

The 22-year-old Cab Calloway performs at the Cotton Club.

The stock market crashes.

1930

Sadie (41) becomes the first black teacher of domestic science in New York City public schools.

1936

Rise of Nazism in Europe.

Jesse Owens wins four gold medals in the Olympics; Adolf Hitler refuses to shake his hand.

In so many ways, these women really tell us how to live. They've lived so well. They know how to love. This is a partnership of over a hundred years. It demonstrates a real lesson on how to live with somebody — whether it's your best friend or your spouse or your sister or brother.

Q: During the course of adapting *Having Our Say* for the stage, how did you make that leap from page to stage? Were there particular devices you felt were necessary to use to bring it alive for an audience?

A: Well, it needed an action and an event. For that we use the element of cooking a celebratory dinner in honor of their father's birthday. I also felt that there needs to be a progression. Part of that is accomplished by having a visitor — us. There's a relationship that grows between them and us. While we listen, more and more is revealed.

Q: As part of your research for this production, you had a wonderful opportunity to meet with the Delany sisters. How did they come across to you?

A: I guess when I first met them what was most striking was I had never met anyone quite so old, and they were ancient women. But after speaking with them for, I would say, ten minutes, the age melted away. They were so young. They were so present, and so alive, and just looking into their eyes was not just an experience of great wisdom and experience, but so much light! They have memories better than mine, which I guess is not hard, but they remember everything perfectly! Their sense of detail is extraordinary. Their sense of humor — I mean, I'm sure that's why they've lived so long. They laughed more in the hour we were with them than most of us laugh in a week. And they clearly adored each other, and that was a wonderful thing to see. And their dynamic with Amy [Hill Hearsh, who wrote the book with them] was also marvelous. There's a great deal of care and respect there.

Q. How did they feel about having their lives adapted into a play?

A: They were very excited about it. They were just having such a great time with all of it. As they say, "If you can help even just one person, it's worth doing — that's what Mama always said." What I found so amazing was that having absorbed the book totally, I thought I would go and meet them and then see who they really were. But they were exactly who I thought they would be. It was just like meeting old friends — recognizing them and being with them. We just all connected on a very deep level. They're extraordinary human beings.

Q: What are you hoping to accomplish with this new production? What is different about how you see the play now, 15 years later?

A: We are in a new era, with Obama now — the first African-American president in the White House. At the end of the play, Bessie says there'll never be an African-American president and Sadie says "there will be," and in fact, now there is.

The other thing is that Bessie and Sadie have both died. This makes it like a new play: looking at who they are, and what they have contributed in a way that has to do with memory in a different way. Now, we're remembering them as they remembered their lives and the lives of their relatives and ancestors. It takes on a kind of mystical quality that's reflected in the new conception of the production. On a very simple level, the design is different. Rather than it being in a circle — going from room to room to room — we're going in one direction, and ending up in a more and more

1939

Sadie is 50. Bessie is 48.

War breaks out in Europe.

Marian Anderson sings before 75,000 at the Lincoln Memorial after being denied permission by the Daughters of the American Revolution to perform in Constitution Hall. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigns from the DAR.

1941

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. declares war on Japan.

1945

Sadie (56) and Bessie (54) move to the Bronx.

Harry Truman becomes president.

Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., becomes the first African-American to command a U.S. Air Force base.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are bombed by the U.S.

1950

Bessie (59) retires from her dental practice.

The Korean War begins.

Poet Gwendolyn Brooks is the first African-American to win a Pulitzer Prize.

abstract space, because they are talking to us from a different vantage point.

It's just so precious to hear their wisdom now, filtered through the last fifteen years of experience. We are coming to them in a different way. I think it will engender a lot of very interesting questions about the basics of "Who are we as Americans, at this moment in time?"; "Who were we?"; "Where've we been?"; "Where're we now?" and "Where are we going?"

If I think of my plays as children, then this is my sweetest child! And there's something kind of wonderful about getting back together and visiting with my most inspiring, comforting, and loving play.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What true or biographical stories are you drawn to? If you were to adapt that story into a play, which pieces would you leave in and what would you choose to cut out? How does keeping the audience's interest on stage differ from keeping the reader's interest on the page?
- Have you ever met anyone who is two or more generations older than you? What were your expectations for how the conversation would go? How were those expectations met in conversation, or how did they change as you got to know the individual(s)?
- Above, Emily Mann notes the changes in perspective between the original 1995 production and the 2009 revival at the McCarter Theatre Center. After watching *Having Our Say* at Hartford Stage, how does the Delany sisters' story resonate differently than even seven years ago? What is present in our culture today that is reflected in the sisters' memories? What has changed since 2009 that might change how the story affects audiences?

Interview with the Director: Jade King Carroll

Reprinted by permission of Long Wharf Theatre



Director Jade King Carroll.

Before this production of *Having Our Say* came to Hartford Stage, it was performed at Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, CT. Theatre professionals call this a co-production—multiple theatres collaborate to produce a show, and then that production is performed at each theatre with the same set, props, and actors. *Having Our Say* was performed at Long Wharf February 17-March 13, 2016. On January 22, 2016, early in rehearsals for the show, Long Wharf staff interviewed director Jade King Carroll about the rehearsal process and what draws her to the story.

Q: You have a particularly personal connection to *Having Our Say*. What can you tell us about your history with this play?

A: My father wrote the original music to the original production at the McCarter Theatre as well as when it transferred to Broadway. So I was able to be with him during tech week during some of the

1954

Brown v. Board of Education: The U.S. Supreme Court rules segregation in public education unconstitutional.

1955**Sadie is 66. Bessie is 64.**

Rosa Parks of Montgomery, Alabama, refuses to give up her bus seat to a white man. A bus boycott is organized by Martin Luther King, Jr., and local NAACP leaders.

1957**Sadie (68) and Bessie (66) move to Mt. Vernon, New York.**

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 — protecting the right to vote — becomes law.
Hank Aaron is voted M.V.P. in the National League.

1960**Sadie (71) retires.**

John F. Kennedy is elected president.
To Kill a Mockingbird is published; *A Raisin in the Sun* is produced on Broadway.

Broadway run. I was 14 so that was my first time observing a Broadway tech, and of course I was in the house as he was writing the music in the months prior to the McCarter run. So it's a play that has been near and dear to my heart for a long time. Sadie Delany and I have the same birthday. And I got to meet both of the Delany sisters and, of course, watch Gloria Foster and Mary Alice in those roles.

Q: How would you describe your job as the director?

A: As a director I tend to follow the playwright and what the story wants and what the playwright's intentions are and the truth of each moment with the characters. What they want and who they are...I tend not to have large concepts, but the work that I like to live in and direct is often about human connection and storytelling and characters.

Q: As far as we know, this is the first time that Long Wharf has an all female cast, design, and production team. How did you choose the team for *Having Our Say*?

A: All of the designers are designers I worked with about two years ago at Two Rivers on *Trouble In Mind*. It's a great team. I've worked with all of the designers quite a few times. Karen Perry I've known for a decade, and I can't count how many shows we've done together. She's our costume designer, and she's wonderful. Nicole Pearce does a lot of dance and did *A Raisin in the Sun* and *King Hedley II* with me. I'm using my father's original music. Alexis Distler is a scenic designer who I just adore working with, and again, I can't count how many shows we've done together.

What's also wonderful is that the play was written by Emily Mann, who is my mentor and also a female playwright and artistic leader. And both the actresses are female. So I kind of looked at the list and said, "Oh, we have an all female team!" but really it wasn't my intention to have an all female team, but I just picked the people that I thought were best to tell this story and that I really enjoyed collaborating with and that worked well together. It's my A-Team, and they just happen to all be ladies.

Q: Can you talk more about the relationship that you have with playwright Emily Mann?

A: I have a show running at her theatre right now (*The Piano Lesson*). I can't remember meeting her. My father collaborated with her on a musical called *Betsy Brown* during the first decade of my life. I fell in love with the theatre watching that musical be developed, watching Emily Mann direct. George Faison choreographed. Joe Papp was at the helm of it; he was huge in developing it. I didn't realize as a child what luminaries I was watching. I was just going to work with my father. But I fell in love with what I saw Emily directing, and it just inspired me. And then I saw a production of *The Glass Menagerie* (that she directed) during her first season as Artistic Director at McCarter, just as an audience member. And I remember thinking, "Wow, you can do it with just words." I had been raised on the musical and around music. I fell in love with Tennessee Williams, and at the ripe old age of eleven, I said, "This is what I want to do. I want to direct." And Emily has been absolutely amazing in keeping the door open and mentoring me since then. I was a directing intern at McCarter, and a decade later I just had my directing premiere there. I was her associate on *A Streetcar Named Desire*. She's always had an honest conversation with me and been completely inspiring. I'm very lucky to have her as a mentor. And to be working on this play that twenty years ago was my first Broadway opening. It's a very special moment in time.

1963

Sadie is 74. Bessie is 72.

The death of W.E.B. Du Bois.

Martin Luther King, Jr., delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech to over 250,000 people at the March on Washington.

JFK is assassinated.

1964

Martin Luther King, Jr., wins the Nobel Peace Prize.

1965

Malcolm X assassinated in New York.

Selma to Montgomery protest march.

Voting Rights Act signed by President Johnson.

1967

Sadie is 78. Bessie is 76.

The "long, hot summer" of urban rioting begins in Newark, NJ.

Thurgood Marshall becomes the first African-American Supreme Court Justice.

Escalating U.S. involvement in Vietnam is met with increasing protest.

Q: Has she had any advice for you coming into this process?

A: She's had so much advice for me my whole life. We've talked about [this play]. She'll be stopping into a few rehearsals. We were texting this morning. She's very excited. I remember being 13 or 14 and knowing what a special moment in time it was and having one of [the Delany sisters'] hands in each of mine and looking at Emily and just knowing how special it all was. Being able to share this story with so many people has been a dream twenty years in the making. So here we go!

Q: What do you admire about her writing?

A: You know, I think the way Emily writes is she really captures characters. She writes all kinds of plays, but she's known for what people call "testimonial theatre." Emily made Amy Hearth's book into a play, but you never hear Emily's voice in it, which I think is wonderful. What she does as a playwright is capture the characters' voices. So she's almost invisible. It's really Bessie and Sadie talking to each other. I think that's what makes the play special. It's these two women welcoming you into their house and inviting you into their history and their lives. It's really their voices.

Q: What do you think is the most challenging aspect of directing this production?

A: It's a huge play in that it's just two women telling this story. There's a lot of business. They cook a huge meal and dessert and they prep all of it. I think that is going to be what consumes the most time outside of just sheer telling the story and finding the acting moments. It's going to be challenging to cook a meal every day.

Q: Can you talk specifically about "the business" that the sisters perform?

A: They bake a ham, they bake a chicken, macaroni and cheese, vegetables, dessert...there's like a seven course meal that's made throughout the show, and we watch them do all parts of it. From cleaning out the chicken to dressing it to making the stuffing to making the gravy. It all has to be perfectly timed, because while they're sharing the story with us, they're also talking to each other. "Don't burn the gravy, you always burn it!" So everything has to be timed intricately. It has to be exactly the same every night. It's difficult in any scenario but when it's just two people, it's choreographed. It's choreographed cooking! And some of the cooking will be real, so you know, there's heat, there's butter, there's sautéing, there's water running, and it all literally has to take the exact same amount of time every single time we do it. So finding what that is will be a delightful challenge, but I think that will take up a lot of our rehearsal time.

Q: Why do you think it's imperative to produce this play right now in 2016?

A: I think this is a play that will always be relevant. It is about America, it's about history, it's about life. Celebrating life. Survival. All things that continue to be relevant. It's about sharing stories and what it is to live through. Both of these sisters were so amazing. I'm so honored that I had the chance to meet them. Their spirit was so alive; they were truth tellers. They embraced all of their past and continued moving forward, which is remarkable, and the life they had and that they brought. The twinkle in their eyes at 103. They still felt like there was such youth in their spirit. It's an American story. It's a story of our history, and I think what our future can be.

Q: What do you hope audiences will take away from coming to see *Having Our Say*?

A: I think *Having Our Say* opens an audience's eyes to our past, and it's such a specific past that

1968

Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated in Memphis; Robert Kennedy is assassinated in California.

1969

Sadie is 80. Bessie is 78.

Richard Nixon is sworn in as 37th president.
Neil Armstrong sets foot on the moon.

1974

Sadie is 85. Bessie is 83.

President Nixon resigns following the Watergate scandal.

1981

Sandra Day O'Connor becomes the first woman Supreme Court Justice.

these women have. Loraine Hansberry says, “through the specific you get the universal.” I hope that audiences will have a conversation after seeing this show that they wouldn’t have had before seeing it.

Q: How do you handle opening and closing night as a director?

A: I get really nervous! I remember being about, gosh, I forget, but I was a teenager in a children’s theatre company, and I remember crying after we closed. My father said, “It’ll pass, it will get better.” But I still cry after a show opens or closes. It’s an exciting nervousness, it’s not so much a fear, but you know, you’re releasing something that you’ve been working on for months. And the anticipation of what that is. I get all of those nerves still. Even at first rehearsal.

Q: What’s your favorite part of the process? What do you relish in?

A: I love so much of the process. I really like creating the world with the designers and all of the research and thought and pre-production that goes into that. There’s nothing for me that’s better than being in a rehearsal room with the actors. But probably tech and previews are my favorite. That’s when all of the elements that you’ve been talking about for months come together. And then you have the ability to have an audience in and then continue to work off of their responses with all of the elements in the space. So I think tech and previews are the most exciting. But I love folding it all together. And then sharing it with the ability to change the next day.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Do you have a mentor—someone who can teach you about a field that interests you and offer opportunities? What do you think makes a good mentor? Where might you seek out a mentor who could share their expertise with you while you develop your passion?
- Who is your “A-Team?” Who do you enjoy collaborating with on projects, on a team, or creating art or music? What is your dream project you’d like to create with your favorite collaborators?

Other co-productions between Hartford Stage and Long Wharf include **THE UNDERPANTS** by Steve Martin and **BELL, BOOK, AND CANDLE** by John Van Druten. What benefits and challenges might there be to theatres doing co-productions?

1982

Sadie is 93. Bessie is 91.
Equal Rights Amendment
defeated.

1986

Sadie is 97. Bessie is 95.
Halley's Comet returns.
Martin Luther King, Jr.'s
birthday is celebrated
as a federal holiday.

1989

Sadie celebrates
her 100th birthday.
Barbara Harris, an African-
American Episcopal priest,
becomes the first female
bishop of the worldwide
Anglican Church.

1990

Nelson Mandela
released; the dismantling
of apartheid begins.

THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

The Delany Sisters: Distinct Individuals and an Incredible Pair

By Andy Germuga

One of the most remarkable aspects of *Having Our Say* is how thoroughly it brings the Delany sisters to life before our eyes. The sisters invite us, the audience, into their home, as they cook a meal and share their stories with us openly and freely. They quickly establish their long history together and talk about how much they have shared with each other throughout their lives. With such a duo, one might think that they have become so entwined as to become indistinguishable. But this is very much not the case. Early on, they speak to their fundamental differences as sisters.

Sadie describes Bessie as “what we used to call a ‘feeling child;’ she was sensitive and emotional. She was quick to anger, and very outspoken.” Sadie, on the other hand was a “mama’s child” who “always did what I was told. I was calm and agreeable” (Act I, scene 1). This is the fundamental dichotomy between them that will be illustrated throughout the rest of the play. Bessie is a firecracker, ready to fight for herself and her loved ones as she operates her dental practice and helps those around her. Sadie is an even-keeled and forgiving schoolteacher, able to find good around her in almost any situation. This is not to say that these roles completely define them; Bessie is certainly a loving and caring sister, and Sadie expresses her fair share of anger at the “rebbly boys” who show racism and hatred to them as they make their way in the world (Act I, scene 1).

But their differing personalities do come out in some of the stories they share. Bessie is a fighter. She tells the story of joining protest movements to fight for equality. Sadie says “all you had to do was say the word ‘protest’ and Bessie was usually there! She marched in more protests in New York City than anyone cares to remember” (Act III, scene 2). She is clearly admiring of her sister, excited by her ability to work with others to help show the need for change in the country. As for Sadie, she “never did like protests. No, no, no, I do not like confrontations” (Act II, scene 2).

Sadie and Bessie draw parallels between their relationship and the relationship of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. This comparison comes quite far into the play, towards the end of the second act. Of Washington, Sadie says, “He’s not appreciated today, but he did a lot for our people getting them educated. He wanted you to be literate, to own your forty acres and a mule” (Act II, scene 2). Bessie states “Still, I believe in Dr. Du Bois’ approach: I would have given life and limb to the cause” (Act II, scene 2). The difference in approach is one which they acknowledge is full of debate, with an argument over how “threatening” towards white people they could be and still be successful in improving the position of African-Americans in society. This is a difficult question for them. As Bessie says earlier in the play, “If it weren’t for those kind white missionaries



Brenda Pressley in *Having Our Say*.

1991

Bessie celebrates her 100th birthday.

The beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles is captured on videotape. The Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings are broadcast.

1993

Sadie is 103. Bessie is 101.

Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years is published.

1995

Bessie dies at age 104. *Having Our Say* is adapted and a hit at McCarter and on Broadway. Million Man March in Washington, D.C. OJ Simpson is acquitted.

1997

President Clinton apologizes for the Tuskegee experiments.

at Saint Aug's, and my mother's white relatives who loved me, I would have hated all white people. Every last one" (Act II, scene 1).

By the end of the play, it has become clear that the sisters' differing personalities have been a tremendous boon to them throughout their lives. As Bessie says, they "kind of balance each other out" (Act I, scene 1). Their reliance on each other has meant that they are able to push each other and check each other, which surely led to their incredibly full, long lives. And the length of those lives allows them to pass on their final view of the world to the audience. Spitfire Bessie says near the end of the play, "I'll tell you a little secret: I'm starting to feel optimistic"(Act III, scene 2). She is not only optimistic about the state of the country, and also about what her relationship with Sadie means for her future. "Maybe I'll get into Heaven after all. I do have some redeeming qualities. I may have to hang on to Sadie's heels, but I'll get there," she says (Act III, scene 2). Together, they work, and fight, and push, leaving the audience with a model for getting through difficult circumstances and living extraordinary lives.



Olivia Cole in *Having Our Say*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Which sister do you identify with more? Why?
- Do you have any relationships where you rely on each other to balance you out?
- How do the sisters' different personalities offer a unique perspective on the changes throughout history?

Faith In Country

By Krista DeVellis

Despite many hardships, the Delany sisters maintain a lot of faith in the United States of America throughout the play. Instead of allowing the hardships they endure to swallow their optimism, they focus on celebrating the achievements of the nation as they go along. They stay educated and informed in the nation's politics, and remain hopeful that the government will support its people.

Sadie and Bessie tend to look at the positive side of many events in American history, rather than the negative. As they share the details of their past, they are eager to connect their successes to America. For instance, when Bessie speaks of their father, she says, "Our Papa became the first elected Negro bishop of the Episcopal Church," to which both Delany sisters chant "U.S.A." (Act I, scene 1). Their father instilled in them a sense of pride and patriotism. Sadie recalls her reason for attending college: "Papa said to me, 'Daughter, you are college material. You owe it to your nation, your race, and yourself to go'" (Act II, scene 1). The Delany sisters were raised to be grateful for the opportunities that they have and to have pride in their country.

1998

DNA evidence confirms that Thomas Jefferson likely fathered the children of his slave, Sally Hemings.

1999

Sadie dies at 109.
Having Our Say film airs on television.

2001

September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

2003

United States invades Iraq.

When they were adults, Sadie and Bessie moved from Raleigh, North Carolina, to New York City. Bessie became a practicing dentist and ingrained herself into the narrative of Harlem, where her office was located. There, Bessie was particularly well known in the community. “My patients would go on vacation and send postcards addressed only to ‘Dr. Bessie, New York City’ and I would get those cards,” she says. “This was the center of Harlem! From my office window you could see everything that was going on” (Act II, scene 2). In the 1920s, her office also became a meeting place for black activists in Harlem. Bessie attended many protests herself, standing up and demanding her rights as an American citizen.

Sadie and Bessie’s faith is not blind or naïve, but rather informed and based on their own personal sense of positivity. They are knowledgeable about the shortcomings in the government system, but continue to believe in the potential for good that the government can do. In the scene below, the Delany sisters talk about their zest for voting:

BESSIE

Though one of the happiest days of my life was back in 1920,

BESSIE and SADIE (*together*)

when women got the right to vote.

BESSIE

Sadie and I registered to vote immediately and we have never missed a chance to vote since.

SADIE

Now, where we vote, the people at the polls have come to know us. They say, “Here come the Delany sisters. We knew you’d get here,

BESSIE and SADIE (*together*)

one way or another!”

BESSIE

Of course we’d get there! Negroes, more than anyone, need to make sure they vote, to make themselves heard in the system.

SADIE

We’ve come a long, long way in a short, short time since slavery days, and there’s no use in quitting now.

(Act II, Scene 2)



Brenda Pressley and Olivia Cole in *Having Our Say*.

The Delany sisters have lived firsthand the struggle to gain these rights, and they want to take advantage of the opportunities they have. It is due in part to this struggle that Sadie and Bessie have so much pride for their country. “Why, colored folks built this country, and that is the truth,” Bessie says, “We were the laborers, honey! We were the backbone of this country” (Act I, scene 1). In reference to why many people did not talk about their time as slaves, Bessie says, “You didn’t sit and cry in your soup, honey, you just went on” (Act I, scene 2). The Delany sisters try to take a similar approach to things such as the Jim Crow Laws, racism, and discrimination. They choose instead to celebrate the country’s advancements. Later in the play, Bessie reiterates, “I’ll tell you something else, honey. We were good citizens! Good Americans. We loved our country, even

2004

Barack Obama addresses the Democratic Convention and attracts national attention. In November he is elected to the United States Senate.

2005

Condoleezza Rice appointed Secretary of State, the first African-American woman to hold that position.

Hurricane Katrina devastates New Orleans.

2008

Barack Obama is elected president of the United States.

Timeline reprinted by permission of McCarter Theatre Center.

2016 IS A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YEAR.

Imagine Sadie and Bessie Delany filmed a 30-second “get out the vote” commercial for young voters. What do you think they would say? Write and shoot a Delany sisters voting commercial that does not endorse a particular candidate, but rather encourages young Americans to exercise their right to vote.

though it didn’t always love us back” (Act I, scene 2).

The Delany sisters witnessed several generations of American history in which black people had to fight for their constitutional rights. This struggle only served to strengthen their pride in America. “Lord, ain’t it good to be an American?” (Act III, scene 2) Sadie asks near the end of the play. The Delany sisters choose to support their nation, and to take full advantage of the rights they had won.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What do you think Bessie and Sadie would say about our nation in 2016?
- What groups are fighting for rights in the United States of America today? What achievements have been made?
- How do you tend to respond to struggles in your own life? What can we learn from the Delany sisters?

EXPLORATIONS THROUGH ORAL HISTORY



Brenda Pressley in *Having Our Say*.

On September 22, 1991, *The New York Times* published an article by Amy Hill Hearth about the Delany sisters. In response to interest from a book publisher, Hearth spent two years interviewing with the Delanys gathering their oral histories. The three wrote the book *Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters’ First 100 Years* together.

Recording oral histories either through video, audio, or written form can be a way to preserve accounts of life and events that could be forgotten as generations leave this earth. Some other oral history projects include:

Words to Give By: <http://wordstogiveby.org/registration/>

StoryCorps: <https://storycorps.org/>

Shoah Foundation: <https://sfi.usc.edu/>

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why is the collection of oral histories important?
- What groups of people should share their oral histories? How does this change throughout time?
- How can you use different mediums to share insights learned through the collection of oral histories (articles, books, plays, film, visual art, collage, soundscape, etc.)?

Having Their Say Oral History Project

Having Their Say: Generations in Conversation is an oral history project designed to gather and preserve the past through interviews. Hartford Stage invited a group of local female students of color to partner with ten senior African-American women to share stories specific to our Hartford community. Through a series of intergenerational dialogues, the participants exchanged their personal journeys, reflecting on the influences that have shaped their lives here in our city.

Having Their Say: Generations in Conversation has been made possible through generous funding from Connecticut Humanities, the Greater Hartford Arts Council, and the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, as recommended by the Jackson-Batchelder Family Fund.

Insights from the *Having Their Say: Generations in Conversation* project...

“Just focus and keep on keepin’ on.”

—GERALDINE WELLS JONES

“Everything you do leads to something else — and I wouldn’t do anything differently.”

—JANET LEE JACKSON

“I make every effort to bring children and elders together. They learn from and teach one another — so important and so necessary.”

—PATRICIA JOHNSON

“There’s fear when we don’t know one another. And then we realize we have so much in common.”

—ANN SIMPSON JENNINGS

“Know you have hard work in front of you and don’t let anyone turn you around.”

—ELAINE BROADEN MOBLEY

In the spirit of the Delany sisters’ *Having Our Say*, we invite you to join us in witnessing tales of hope, survival and family across generations. Visit <http://hts.hartfordstage.com/> to watch interviews and learn more!

Conduct Your Own Oral History Interview!

Are you interested in learning about your own family history, or history through the eyes of a mentor or elder in your community? Reach out to them and ask for an interview. The following tools will be helpful in gathering information.

- **NOTEPAD** — Write your questions down so you remember what you would like to ask. Also, keep the notepad close by to take notes in case you think of a question while in conversation.
- **AUDIO RECORDING DEVICE** — Record the interview so you can be present and listen to the interviewee. You can archive the recording later, in case someone else would like to hear what your interviewee has to say. Also, you can be sure to get the whole story when you record it!



Tyra Harris and Janet Lee Jackson (above) and Miracle Hyde and Patricia Johnson (below), participants in *Having Their Say: Generations in Conversation*.



› Tip: Many cell phones have voice recorders and can be used for this purpose. Then send or back up the file elsewhere to keep it safe!

- **VIDEO RECORDING DEVICE** (optional) — If you prefer, you can video record your interview. How would you share this with an audience?
- **COMPUTER** — If you want to transcribe (create a written document of the full interview), you can use a computer at school or the library to type the interview. You may need to rewind often to hear all the words. This can be time consuming, but is another great way to document the stories that person shares in their exact words!

THOUGHTS TO GET YOU STARTED

- What interests you about this person? (Are you curious about a particular event, a specific time period, or about their life story?)
- What background do you need to understand the stories they tell? Do you need to know where they grew up or went to school, to better understand what they tell you? Ask what school was like for them, or their first job.
- Asking about a childhood home or special object can yield some great stories. Ask about specific dates, places, and events (“Tell me about your first day of school,” or “tell me about your childhood room,” etc.).
- When they start telling a story, listen! Often stories can lead to great details that wouldn’t come up otherwise.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Tell me about your childhood home.
- What was your school like as a child?
- Where was your favorite place to go?
- Tell me about your family. Where were your parents from? Where did they raise you and your siblings?
- Tell me about your first job?
- What was most exciting about that time?
- Did you ever get discouraged? What did you do about it?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Family History Timeline

In the timeline for this study guide, we include not only important events that occurred throughout the 20th century, but also important moments in the Delany sisters’ lives. Study the timeline and ask your family members where they were during these important moments in history. Are there other important moments in history from your parents’ country or your grandparents’ countries that you would like to add?

1896 Plessy v. Ferguson: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that “separate but equal” public accommodations are legal, paving the way for Jim Crow laws.

1903 The first powered airplane is flown by the Wright brothers.
Ford Motor Company is founded.

1910 Halley’s Comet makes its first 20th century appearance.
The NAACP is incorporated.

1917 The U.S. enters World War I.

- 1920** American women win the right to vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment.
- 1929** The 22-year-old Cab Calloway performs at the Cotton Club.
The stock market crashes.
- 1939** War breaks out in Europe.
- 1945** Hiroshima and Nagasaki are bombed by the U.S.
- 1950** The Korean War begins.
Poet Gwendolyn Brooks is the first African-American to win a Pulitzer Prize.
- 1954** *Brown v. Board of Education*: The U.S. Supreme Court rules segregation in public education unconstitutional.
- 1955** Rosa Parks of Montgomery, Alabama refuses to give up her bus seat to a white man. A bus boycott is organized by Martin Luther King, Jr. and local NAACP leaders.
- 1957** The Civil Rights Act of 1957 — protecting the right to vote — becomes law.
Hank Aaron is voted M.V.P. in the National League.
- 1963** Martin Luther King, Jr., delivers his “I Have a Dream” speech to over 250,000 people at the March on Washington.
JFK is assassinated.
- 1965** Malcolm X assassinated in New York.
Selma to Montgomery protest march.
Voting Rights Act signed by President Johnson.
- 1968** Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated in Memphis.
Robert Kennedy is assassinated in California.
- 1969** Richard Nixon is sworn in as 37th president.
Neil Armstrong sets foot on the moon.
- 1974** President Nixon resigns following the Watergate scandal.
- 1981** Sandra Day O’Connor becomes the first woman Supreme Court Justice.
- 1982** Equal Rights Amendment defeated.
- 1986** Halley’s Comet returns.
- 1990** Nelson Mandela released; the dismantling of apartheid begins.
- 1991** The beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles is captured on videotape.
The Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings are broadcast.
- 1995** *Having Our Say* is adapted and a hit at McCarter and on Broadway.
Million Man March in Washington DC.
OJ Simpson is acquitted.
- 2001** September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.
- 2003** United States invasion of Iraq.
- 2005** Condoleezza Rice appointed Secretary of State, the first African American woman to hold that position.
Hurricane Katrina devastates New Orleans.
- 2008** Barack Obama is elected president of the United States.

Remembering Recipes

Throughout *Having Our Say*, Sadie and Bessie Delany prepare and cook a meal commemorating their father’s birthday. They include his favorite recipes such as chicken and gravy, sweet potatoes, macaroni and cheese, cabbage, broccoli, and a dessert of pound cake and ambrosia.

Interview a favorite relative and learn what recipes your family holds dear. Write each recipe down

and choose a day on the calendar to practice making that recipe with that relative or prepare it for them for a special occasion.

As a class, you can bring in favorite family recipes and create a class cookbook!

Acting Through the Ages

Actresses Brenda Pressley and Olivia Cole portray Dr. Bessie Delany and Sadie Delany. While Ms. Pressley and Ms. Cole are seasoned actresses, they are not 101 and 103 years old! They must use their imaginations and training as actresses to create the physical life of these two women onstage. Try the following exercise to explore physical choices for characters of different ages. You'll need some open space and a chair.

Start by lying on the floor on your back. Take a few deep breaths. Imagine yourself at three years old. Try standing up as your three-year-old self. How is your balance? How do you stand? What catches your eye? Imagine you are in a park. Pick a flower. How do you touch that flower? How does that flower make you feel? Walk across the room as though it is a park in your imagination. When you get to the other side of the room, take a deep breath and transform yourself into your six-year-old self. How do you move across the park? How do you pick a flower? Now move across the room as a twelve year old. What changes? Are you more confident? Less confident? How do you feel about your appearance? How do you pick a flower? Now move across the room as a sixteen year old. What is most important to you as you move? Continue the exercise at the following ages. Then try the exercise imagining an indoor space such as a living room or kitchen. How do you move about the space at each age? How do you sit down and stand up from a chair?

- 20 years old
- 35 years old
- 48 years old
- 60 years old
- 75 years old
- 82 years old
- 90 years old
- 100 years old
- 107 years old



Brenda Pressley and Olivia Cole in *Having Our Say*.



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