

The x's death, she
began to become



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The play text, its context and the ideas presented in the play
The play I chose is *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* written by award-winning poet and performer Ntozake Shange. The play is a unique combination of poetry, music, dance, and a drama called a choreopoem and it itself is revolutionary. The choreopoem was written in 1975, in the midst of the feminist theater era (1970s-1980s) yet Shange differentiates from other respectable feminist such as Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and others who while advocated for rights and liberties; consciousness-raising groups were white. Ntozake Shange was a breath of fresh air, she became an outspoken black woman who challenged the black bourgeoisie she grown up with; she advocated for all women of color because she believed in equality for all women was apart of the Lord's platform. I believe in order to understand how strong Ntozake Shange is and how significant *Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* is you need to know Shange's history and intentions. Shange was born Paulette Williams, in 1948, the eldest of four-high achieving siblings and to Paul T. Williams, a surgeon who treated many well-known athletes and Eloise Williams, a psychiatric social worker and an educator. Shange lived in a massive home among other successful people of color. During the trail days of *Brown vs Board of Education*, Change was bused to a previously all-white school where she as tormented and bullied for the remainder of her studies. Shange's parents among the Talented Tenth that W.

E. B. Du Bois.

Du Bois wasn't the only notable black visitor to the Williams home. Among Shange's parents' friends were Dizzy Gillespie, Paul Robeson, and the musician Mongo Santamaría. In high school, Shange started publishing poetry in the school's newspaper, and after Malcolm X's death, she began to become aware of the shift at home and school. At school she was criticized after writing several obituaries for Malcolm X, at home she didn't fit into the picture perfect family because girls like her— with social standing— were brought up to be ladies. Shange's parent's expectations for her reflected the bourgeois ambitions of the time.

“ All I had to do was go to school, keep my virginity, and marry a doctor,” she said. And she did, she enrolled she enrolled at Barnard in 1966. At eighteen, she married an older law student, and when their marriage shattered, she shattered alongside it. She attempted suicide several times: sticking her head in an oven, drinking chemicals, slashing her wrist, O. D. ing on Valium, and driving her car into the ocean— it wasn't discovered until that she was bipolar. But without a husband or social expectation to answer to, Shang became a free woman, she could be the real her.

Change dedicated herself to understanding how her at times lonely and painful past as a black girl turned her into an estranged colored girl. As she continued her education and became an educator, Shange realized she wanted to live, that she had a purpose; she wanted to advocate and recognize not only the fragility of her existence but instead of all the colored women she knows, loves, and imagined. She described it as “ in that moment of seeing the double rainbow, I felt connected to the delicacy and irrepressible majesty of life.” Summer of 1974 Shange began writing a

series of poems about seven nameless women, exploring the various trials that black women often confronted, from rape and abortion to domestic violence and child abuse (AIs).

Ntozake Shange just created what will soon be named *Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* and gave a voice to women of color everywhere. *Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* follows the lives of seven women, it follows the relationship between black women and men, society, and justice. The women are nameless but sites are identified by the color Shange assigned them— blue, red, yellow, green, orange, purple, and brown— the women represent the colors of the rainbow and the last one symbolizes the black women. The rainbow tells the identity and life experiences of colored women. The titles of the choreopoem's sections are intentionally lowercase, and several of them feature deliberate non-standard spelling of familiar words. The prologue, "dark phases", introduces the seven women as they sing about the transition from childhood to adulthood. In order of the sections, next is "graduation nite", the lady in yellow graduates from high school and loses her virginity to one of her male friends. In "now I love somebody more than", the lady in blue sings about how the blues and salsa allow her to retain her heritage and how dance allows her to express herself.

The sections that follow after are "no assistance", "i'm the poet who", "latent rapists", "abortion cycle #1", "sechita", "toussaint", "one", "i usedta live in the world", "pyramid", "no more love poems", "my love is too", "somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff", "sorry", "positive", "a nite with beau willie brown", and the final section is "a layin on of hands".

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The artistic response, creative ideas and explorations and my own experiences of live theater as a spectator. As a theater student, I have been privileged to have seen and been apart of several performances, which all exposed me to the endless possibilities of theater. In my production of *Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, I use my inspirations to create something I am proud of. A peer of mine, Karen Montreal, performed an untitled original piece and her focus was on characterization. She portrayed three different people and only her voice, actions, and personality to differentiate between the characters. Karen inspired me to focus on characterization and she taught the importance of details. The next performance is *Tartuffe*, a performance I saw on a field trip to a local university.

Tartuffe's setting and stage took me by surprise, the stage told a story alongside the actors. The entire play took place on one stage, in one setting, a living room. Another aspect of *Tartuffe* I plan on implementing in my production is the detailed and deliberate attention to small effects, the hair of the characters in using hair to symbolize social status, mental state, and characterization. With this I decided to use style my seven actresses with hairstyles that match their dilemmas and situation, for example after the lady in blue gets raped, her hair is teased, frizzy, and choppy, to draw attention to her current mindset of fear and pain. In this play, everything happens at a fast pace, and they're a significant amount of section were the actresses are alone.

During my junior year, I saw a production of the *Little Mermaid* at a local high school, and to transition from sea to land the production had a rotating stage

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and the transitions were efficient. I want to add onto Ntozake Shange's vision of the characters, I believe characterization was an important aspect of her thus her choice of giving them individual colors. I want the characters to remain nameless and I want their the audience to give them an identity. By this I mean, I want those watching my production to be capable of seeing someone or themselves in one of the characters. I do believe we have all known, been, or have feared of becoming one of the actresses in their situations. This is why I believe characterization is important.

Although I won't be giving the characters prescribed names, I want their story and their experience to become their identity, to be what they are known for. Their laughter, their cries, their sorrow, and their fears. As I previously mentioned I want the actresses hair to become apart of their character because as a black female I understand how important one's hair is to a black woman's happiness and confidence.

During calm moments, where the characters are content I envision their curl pattern to be relaxed, moments of threat or fear I want their hair up in a protective manner, and once they're broken I want their hair loose and wild. Variations of those three will be used depending on the impact of the different events. As previously mentioned, this choreopoem in performance has fast-paced scenes and often requires different setting arrangements.

This is where the rotating stage comes to play. I intend for the rotating stage to have two sides. Several of the scenes in love the women in or standing outside of an apartment and the other side will be dedicated to the changing

scenes and locations. For the side designated apartment, I envision a two-story platform.

The top is the inside of an apartment and the first floor resembling the front of a building with a sidewalk. I want the attention of the audience to remain on the characters, and I decided to keep the stage simplistic. In particular to lighting, I plan for the colors to coordinate with the color of the character present or white in scenes of more than one character. For the scenes with individual characters, I want the shade of the given lighting to adjust depending on the atmosphere and emotions of the actress. For example in a scene of calm and serenity, the lighting for the lady in blue would be a light and gentle blue in contrast to a scene of anger the lighting would alternate to a dark stormy blue. My directorial intentions and the intended impact on an audience

Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf discusses and brings attention to the unspoken reality of what it means to be at the bottom of the pyramid, what it means to be a woman of color in a society where people refuse to acknowledge color. This choreopoem drama discusses controversial topics such as rape and in its nature makes some uncomfortable.

My directorial intention is to use this state of uncomfortable y to my advantage and to confront it. I choose this drama knowing of the risks and the topics within it, and I'm also aware that this choreopoem was not intended to be sugar-coated or handled gently because the stories it tells are not sugar-coated and that rejection, depression, self-loath, and suicide are not gentle. Shange did a wonderful job at giving the women involved a voice and platform, and I plan on doing the same thing. This choreopoem is not a

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play intended for reading but instead to be heard and spoken about, to cause reflections and to break barriers.

My audience needs to be able to grasp and obtain the information on stage. My intended audience is young adults, my justification for this is that I acknowledge the heavy topics within the choreopoem drama and because I want my audience to be capable of relating to the events. Although my production is open to all audience, my target audience is young women.

Young women of all colors, because although the drama follows the events of seven black women, the emotions are all the same— as Shange believes all women are equal in God's platform— I want my production to inspire women to comfort and to lean on each other.