

TALKING POINTS FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION: NORTH THE MUSICAL

Show & Theater Company:

- *NORTH The Musical*, written and produced by Ashli St. Armant

Art Form:

- Musical theater (a play with songs)

Context:

- *NORTH* is set in 1850's America and features a child (Lawrence) and his mother (Minnie) as they escape slavery in Louisiana and travel North through the Underground Railroad.
- The story is based on actual accounts of slave escapes through the Underground Railroad network, as well as playwright Ashli St. Armant's personal family history of overcoming slavery in Louisiana.
- ? What do you already know about this time in history?
- ? What would it take to help people travel without being caught?

Main Concepts:

- The full experience of Black Americans seeking freedom: Despite the dangers and oppressive forces of slavery and racism, people lived diverse, multi-faceted lives and had rich emotional experiences.
- ? What might make you feel hopeful, even when you're afraid?
- Music history, especially from Black American culture: Songs in the musical include the styles of jazz, spirituals, blues, and traditional musical theatre. Some of the musicians who inspired the composer are Nat King Cole, Mahalia Jackson, Fela Kuti and Stephen Sondheim.
- ? What kinds of music does your family listen to? Have they taught you any songs that are important to them?

Special Things to Look for:

- People working with the Underground Railroad had to use code words and phrases to hide their plans. Listen out the hidden messages the characters use to communicate.

Theater Etiquette:

- Respect the theater, one person to a seat, limit bathroom breaks, do not kick the seats, no food or drink in the theater (bottled water okay), and turn off cell phones/no texting.
- ? How is watching live theater different than watching a movie or TV?
 - We can't pause, rewind, or fast forward with live theater.
 - Live theater is exciting because each performance is unique.
 - Students are in the same room as the performers. Moving around and making sounds can affect the performers and other members of the audience.