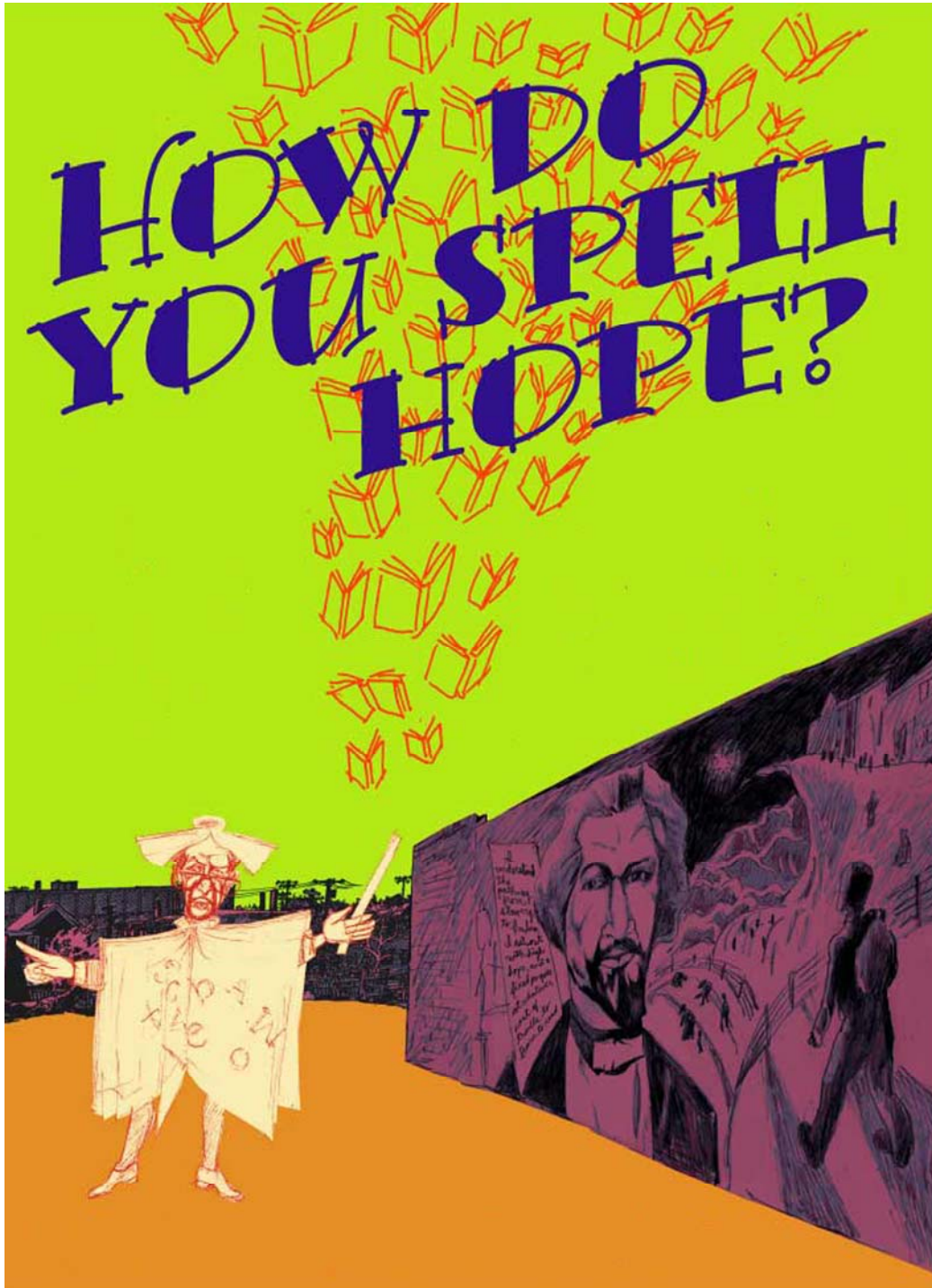




Underground
Railway
Theater



Study Guide and Activity Book

February 2009

Welcome to the Student Matinee Program!

On behalf of resident companies Underground Railway Theater and The Nora Theatre Company, thank you for being a part of Central Square Theater's Student Matinee Program. Both companies have a combined 50-year history of producing award winning professional theater for audiences across the nation. We're delighted that these audiences now include students and teachers in a program crafted specifically for you. Our companion study guides are designed to energize and engage your students in the performances through a variety of theatrically based activities. If you ever have questions about either the guide or our performances, our Education Staff is more than happy to help. Enjoy the show!

Maggie Moore Abdow
Underground Railway Theater Education Director

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About Underground Railway Theater

Underground Railway Theater is one of two Resident Theater Companies at the Central Square Theater in Cambridge, along with the Nora Theater Company. URT creates dynamic connections between high-quality professional theater and community. Combining actors, puppetry and music, URT engages diverse audiences with theater of social content and great visual beauty - theater that challenges and delights, informs and celebrates.

The Theater was founded in 1976 in Oberlin, Ohio, one of the last stops in the midwestern branch of the Underground Railroad. The company took its name from this chapter in American history, carrying on in a spirit of hope and inter-cultural collaboration.

Past work includes performances with major orchestras throughout the country, residencies at the Smithsonian Institute, and appearances at Lincoln Center, Arena Stage and the Kennedy Center, as well as performances in France, Spain, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

How to Use This Study Guide

Thank you for taking the time to look over our Study Guide and Activity Book for *How Do You Spell Hope?* This guide contains information about the show and activities to help enrich your students' experience. The activities can be combined into one unit or done as stand-alone activities.

The Study Guide is divided into three sections:

- ***Get Ready*** to help you and your students prepare to see the show;
- ***Deepen Understanding*** to explore specific elements or themes from the show, and;
- ***Reflect and Connect*** to further engage students in the show they have seen.

Each section contains background information for you and your students, as well as interactive classroom activities and questions for discussion.

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MA Curriculum Connections

The questions and activities in this Study Guide connect with many of the MA Curriculum Frameworks in both Arts and English Language Arts. The following list is a sampling of standards that connect with the lessons in this guide. These standards are taken from the Massachusetts Department of Education Curriculum Frameworks (www.doe.mass.edu):

History Standards

- **Chronology and cause:** students will understand the chronological order of historical events and recognize the complexity of historical cause and effect, including the interaction of forces from different spheres of human activity, the importance of ideas, and of individual choices, actions, and character.
- **Historical understanding:** students will understand the meaning, implications, and import of historical events, while recognizing the contingency and unpredictability of history – how events could have taken other directions – by studying past ideas as they were thought, and past events as they were lived, by people of the time.

English Language Arts and Literacy Standards

Language:

- Students will pose questions, listen to the ideas of others, and contribute their own information or ideas in group discussions and interviews in order to acquire new knowledge.
- Students will make oral presentations that demonstrate appropriate consideration of audience, purpose, and the information to be conveyed.
- Students will acquire and use correctly an advanced reading vocabulary of English words, identifying meanings through an understanding of word relationships.
- Students will identify, describe and apply knowledge of the structure of the English language and standard English conventions for sentence structure, usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

Literature:

- Students will plan and present effective dramatic readings, recitations, and performances that demonstrate appropriate consideration of audience and purpose.

Composition:

- Students will write compositions with a clear focus, logically related ideas to develop it, and adequate detail.
- Students will use self-generated questions, note-taking, summarizing, precise writing, and outlining to enhance learning when reading or writing.
- Students will use open-ended research questions, different sources of information, and appropriate research methods to gather information for their research projects.

Theater Arts Curriculum Frameworks

- Students will describe and demonstrate audience skills of observing attentively and responding appropriately in classroom presentations, rehearsals, and live performance settings.
- Students will identify and describe the visual, aural, oral, and kinetic details of classroom dramatizations and dramatic performances.

Get Ready: Attending a Live Performance

Attending a live show is a unique experience. Going to see a play can be a great opportunity for students, but there is a lot of responsibility that goes with it. In a play, the actors are live onstage in front of the audience. This means they can hear, (and sometimes see) the audience. How you react as an audience member affects what the actors do onstage. Because of this, the audience can be considered another character in the show.

Teachers: Before you come to the theater, please talk with your students about seeing a play and what is expected of them during a live show. Here are some important etiquette points to remember when going to the theater:

- There is no food, candy or gum allowed in the theater.
- Cell phones, PSPs, mp3 players and other electronic devices should be turned off and put away for the performance. If audience members take these items out during intermission, they need to be completely turned off when the show starts again.
- During the performance students should focus their energy and attention on the action happening onstage.
- The audience will have a chance to talk with the actors and some of the production team after the show. During the show, students should be thinking of any questions they might have about what they see onstage.

Get Ready: About The Show

How Do You Spell Hope? combines actors, puppets, and music, in celebration of books and the power and rewards of literacy. The play includes three inspiring stories of courage and compassion in the face of illiteracy: the historical narrative of the great orator Frederick Douglass, the true story of a teenage star athlete who overcomes dyslexia, and the struggles of a contemporary immigrant family. The play transports the audience to the early 19th century where a young Frederick Douglass first learns of the freedom reading brings to those who can unlock its strength. As Douglass looks North to freedom, the audience finds itself back in the present, looking into an immigrant community where a young cashier-turned-reading specialist, Marta, teaches her students the value of literacy. The final story follows a high school athlete, Peter, who triumphs over dyslexia to pursue a college education.

The three stories are woven together seamlessly, as two actors play a dozen roles and travel back and forth through time. Marta uses *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* to inspire Peter to risk everything to learn to read. She also uses her own story of hiding her illiteracy as an immigrant, and then taking the help of a caring boss who promotes her, and helps her further her education. Together Marta and Peter follow the challenges and successes of Douglass as he goes to amazing lengths to educate himself and seize his freedom.

How Do You Spell Hope? was written by Melinda Lopez, a nationally recognized playwright whose awards include a Kennedy Center Award and the Charlotte Woolard Award for the most promising new voice in American theater. The set, conceived by award-winning muralist, David Fichter, in collaboration with book artist, Laurie Blacklow, mirrors the journey through a children's book. Designed as a giant theatrical pop-up book, the turn of each "page" reveals new scenes with puppet stages, actors' entrances, shadow puppet screens and more. The music for *How Do You Spell Hope?* is a rich blend of Latin rhythms and African American spirituals composed by Claudio Ragazzi.

Get Ready: Spotlight on Reading

When Underground Railway Theater became interested in creating a play about reading we asked ourselves, how can we create theater about something so un-theatrical as reading? The most interesting theater, after all, centers about personal human stories, and the most exciting stories include struggle and conflict. Reading, by contrast, is such a still and private activity. At the same time, we were drawn to the idea of a play about reading because it seemed to us that in our media saturated culture – so dominated by television and technology – books somehow take a back seat.

We decided that we should make a play about people who had to overcome great obstacles to learn to read. Perhaps, we thought, the inspiration that gave such people the energy to struggle to learn to read would in turn inspire us with new feelings about the power of books and literacy. After conversations with librarians and teachers, we decided on researching the experiences of African American slaves (who were denied the right to read), people with learning disabilities (for whom reading is a physical challenge), and people who learn to read in a second language (who might have fears about not succeeding, or about not being able to hold on to their own cultural identity).

Playwright Melinda Lopez became involved in the research. She decided on the character of Frederick Douglass because of his unique story: he went from illiteracy to becoming a famous author and orator. Peter Hammill is based on an interview with a Cambridge student. Marta Gonzales is a more fictional character, though based on many books and interviews. At first their three stories existed side by side in the play, until Ms Lopez found a way to weave them together.

Get Ready: Spotlight on Reading

Classroom Activity

How Do You Spell Hope? explores the personal relationship three people have with reading. Before seeing the show, invite your students to think about their own relationship with reading, in this metaphor activity.

Activity Time: 10-15 minutes.

- Begin by asking students to brainstorm for a minute about reading. Ask them to think about their attitudes or feelings towards reading. How do they feel when they read? Why do they choose to read? Why do they choose not to? (If you like, you can ask students to write these ideas down on a piece of paper)
- Ask students to keep their brainstorm in the back of their minds for the next part of the activity. On one area of the board write the word “foods” and on another area of the board write “ways to travel.” Brainstorm some possible items in each of these categories (eg. Food: chocolate, fish, peanut butter, gum. Ways to Travel: train, boat, teleportation, horseback).
- Tell students they are going to make a metaphor using reading as the topic. Instruct one half of the classroom to fill in the sentence

If Reading were a food it would be _____

And ask the other half of the class to complete the sentence

If Reading were a way to travel it would be _____

- Ask students to share their Reading metaphors with the class. Below are some metaphors created by 11-year olds:

Reading is eating chocolate: you want the taste to linger as long as possible.

Reading is traveling: you never know who you'll meet.

Reading is baseball: once you start, the tension builds.

Deepen Understanding: Questions for Discussion

Before Seeing the Show

- Have you ever seen a play before? What show did you see? What happened on stage? What was the experience of watching it like?
- Have you heard the term dyslexia before? What do you know about it?
- *How Do You Spell Hope?* tells the stories of three people who have to struggle to learn to read, all for different reasons. Can you relate the idea of having a hard time learning to do something to your own experience or that of someone you know?
- Look at the image on the front of this study guide. Does this give you any ideas about what you might see in the play?

After the Show

- What aspects of the performance captured your attention or drew you in?
- Were there any things that happened in the play or any characters' actions that confused you or that you had questions about?
- In one scene of the play, Marta's father comes to the grocery store in secret to tell Mr. Washington that she doesn't read English. Why do you think he does this?
- Marta tells Peter that he is *cabezón* (stubborn). She later admits that she is also stubborn. Usually we think of being stubborn as a negative quality; why do you think in this play it can be considered a positive quality? Can you think of a time when being stubborn has helped or hurt you?

Deepen Understanding: The Life of Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Maryland in 1818. When he was eight years old, he was sent to Baltimore to live and work in the home of Hugh and Sophia Auld. His mistress, Mrs. Auld, began to teach Frederick to read and write so that he could read to her from the Bible at night. When Mr. Auld found out about this, he forbade his wife to continue teaching Frederick, and she obeyed. Frederick was closely watched from then on, and never left alone in case he would try to sneak to read and write. But he already had a passion for literacy, and found very creative ways to continue his education on his own. In 1835, he attempted to escape from slavery by forging a passage note signed by Hugh Auld's name, whose signature he had been practicing. He was not successful that time, and ended up caught and jailed. After several different masters and several attempts at escape, Frederick finally escaped for good in 1838 and moved to New York and later New Bedford, MA.

After he won his freedom, Douglass became one of the most important and influential abolitionists (activists against slavery) of the nineteenth century. His autobiography, which Peter reads in *How Do You Spell Hope?* was one of the most effective pieces of anti-slavery literature. Douglass was also active in the movements for women's rights and the resistance movements against war and capital punishment.



Design for Thomas Auld, Frederick Douglass' "young master." Rod marionette.

Deepen Understanding: The Life of Frederick Douglass

On the following page is a copy of the poem “Frederick Douglass” by Robert Hayden and “Hope is the thing with feathers” by Emily Dickinson. You and your students can use these poems to explore some of the themes of the play and how they connect to Frederick Douglass’ life.

Discussion Questions for Poems:

- What are the different ways Robert Hayden describes *freedom* in his poem? Why do you think he describes *freedom* as “beautiful and terrible” as “reflex action” or as “the gaudy mumbo jumbo of politicians”?
- Hayden writes that Douglass will be remembered “with the lives grown out of his life.” How do you think this connects to *How Do You Spell Hope?* When Peter says his mom “just worked hard so that I could have a better life. She wants the best for me.”
- What do you think is the connection between *Hope* and *Freedom*?
- What do you think Emily Dickinson is trying to say about *Hope* in her poem?
- She uses a metaphor to compare *Hope* to a bird, whose song shines through difficult times. What other ways could you describe *Hope*?

Extension Activity:

Robert Hayden felt that Frederick Douglass was important enough to write a poem celebrating him. Ask students to come up with other people they think deserve to be celebrated in a poem. These could be people your students know personally or people they know of.

Have each student choose someone to write a poem about.

Poems for Discussion

Frederick Douglass by Robert Hayden

When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful
and terrible thing, needful to man as air,
usable as earth; when it belongs at last to all,
when it is truly instinct, brain matter, diastole, systole,
reflex action; when it is finally won; when it is more
than the gaudy mumbo jumbo of politicians:
this man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro
beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world
where none is lonely, none hunted, alien,
this man, superb in love and logic, this man
shall be remembered. Oh, not with statues' rhetoric,
not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone,
but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives
fleshing his dream of the beautiful, needful thing.

Hope by Emily Dickinson

Hope is the thing with feathers	I've heard it in the chilliest land,
That perches in the soul,	And on the strangest sea;
And sings the tune--without the words,	Yet, never, in extremity,
And never stops at all,	It asked a crumb of me.

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

Reflect and Connect: “You Can Do All Things”

In the play, Frederick Douglass finds hope in a quote from the bible:

“I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be hindered.”

All three major characters in the play, Marta, Peter and Douglass, must overcome obstacles in their lives. In order to overcome these obstacles, these people had to draw on their internal strength and the help of others.

How Do You Spell Hope? was written not just to tell the stories of these three individuals but to inspire others to think about the role of struggle, freedom and hope in their own lives. On pages 13-20 of this Study Guide are three scenes from the play between Peter and Marta which you can copy for your students to read aloud. After your students have read these scenes (or staged them in the classroom) they can use the discussion questions below to begin making connections between the play and their own experiences. Pages 21-22 include a worksheet and theater activity to further connect the themes of the play to students’ experiences.

Discussion Questions for Peter & Marta Scene:

- How does Peter change over the course of these three scenes? How does this change take place?
- What aspects of Marta’s personality does she use to help Peter? What are her qualities that make her a successful teacher?
- What aspects of Peter’s personality does he use in order to face his dyslexia?
- If Peter or Marta were to describe their feelings about reading in the first scene and then again after the third scene, what words would they use for each?

MARTA

So, tell me something...

PETER

As long as it's not about Frederick Douglass.

MARTA

School's hard for you?

PETER

No, I just like to spend my extra hanging around the library.

MARTA

Where would you rather be?

PETER

Montreal, face-off against the Canadiens.

MARTA

You want to travel? See the world?

PETER

That's the first thing you've said that makes sense.

MARTA

Let's start here. (*She hands him his copy of The Narrative of Frederick Douglass.*)

PETER

That's not what I had in mind.

MARTA

With a book you can go anywhere, any time, any place.

PETER

Come on. Why should I care what happened all those years ago?

MARTA

I don't know—sometimes the struggle of other people can inspire us or...

PETER

I don't need inspiration, I just need to pass.

MARTA

I was hoping we could do better than that.

PETER

Whatever.

MARTA

You are a talented athlete...

PETER

I'm the best.

MARTA

You have a kind of intelligence that the tests don't measure. You can move faster than you think.

PETER

Yeah.

MARTA

But talent isn't what makes you great.

PETER

You don't think so?

MARTA

Nope.

PETER

Then what is it?

MARTA

You're cabezón. Stubborn.

PETER

Yeah.

MARTA

I want to find out why school's hard for you, but I need your help.

PETER

If one more person tells me to try harder— my mother, my teachers, and now you--

MARTA

I'm not asking for you to try harder—I want you to try in a different way. I want us to find a way of learning that works for you. But we have to do it together.

PETER

I don't get it.

MARTA

It's okay. You will.

Scene 1 – p.2

MARTA

How far did you get Peter?

PETER

It took me all night just to read one chapter.

MARTA

That's a start.

PETER

It's not going to cut it for my English teacher.

MARTA

Are you giving up?

PETER

It doesn't matter how hard I try.

MARTA

Help me understand.

PETER

Okay, imagine that you're watching TV, and it's okay for a while, but then something happens, and everyone is suddenly speaking Russian— Or worse, it's just gibberish. A language that isn't even real. That's what reading is like for me. But try telling that to a teacher—they just want put a grade in the book. Especially my English teacher. I bet she can't wait to fail me.

MARTA

Peter, I know this feels overwhelming, but I can tell you why you are struggling so much.

PETER

Why?

MARTA

I think you have dyslexia.

PETER

Is that like cancer?

MARTA

It's a condition that makes reading difficult — Sometimes you see letters reversed, or out of order. But this disability is one of the most common—

PETER

So you're saying that I am stupid?

MARTA

No, no no! That's not what I said—

PETER
My 'disability'?

MARTA
That's like a 'different ability.'

PETER
That sounds like code for 'dumb.'

MARTA
Stop it—we all learn in our own way. Different is not dumb. I'm going to teach you some techniques for reading that will help you—

PETER
What if I say no?

MARTA
Who's been babysitting you all this time?

PETER
Get real.

MARTA
Come on Peter, I'm not fooling around. You're fourteen, and you read at about a third grade level. I want to know how you got this far. You have a friend who tells you the assignments? Maybe someone on the team who gives the plots of book—or do you read the comic book version? How long have you been covering this up?

PETER
I do just fine.

MARTA
No, you don't.

PETER
I gotta go.

MARTA
Come back tomorrow. I want to talk about the next chapter.

PETER
I'm pretty busy tonight.

FURIE PUPPET
Reappearing. Ha-ha—he'll never pass, never—he's past hope—he's too stupid to care—
Disappears.

PETER

I'm not stupid!

MARTA

I never said that—

PETER

No, not you—that's weird.

MARTA

Who is calling you that?

PETER

Never mind.

MARTA

Peter?

PETER

It's me—I think I'm stupid -- I think that because it's true.

MARTA

Sometimes we get used to seeing things a certain way—and it gets comfortable—easy to be “the dumb one,” or “the clumsy one,” or “the lazy one.” But if we want to change, really want to, then one day you just have to say ‘Enough’ to those voices in your head—those voices that say you’ll never be good enough. When you can do that—then you can change. But not until then.

PETER

Yeah, I saw that episode of ‘Touched by an Angel’ too.

MARTA

I'll see you tomorrow.

FURIE PUPPET

I'll be back tomorrow too... *Disappears.*



Design for “Furie Puppet” by David Fichter

PETER

I'm just stupid—

MARTA

No, Peter. Let's start again.

PETER

I hate this, and it'll never make a difference in my life anyways—*he goes to throw the book*—

MARTA

Peter stop! Never throw a book! Never ever!

PETER

It's just words on a page,

MARTA

It's a world—

PETER

It's a dead thing.

MARTA

You disrespect a life here—Frederick Douglass—that's his life in your hands—it's what we have left of him, how we know what he lived through.

PETER

It's just paper—

MARTA

No, Peter. A book is a sacred thing. You know people have died for the right to learn to read. You ask me why it matters? Because we live in the world. Because reading gives us power. Respect yourself enough to learn. No one can take it away from you, not ever.

PETER

Why do you care so much about my mind?

MARTA

Because for every kid who can't read, for every kid that I can't reach—it's one more kid who won't vote, who can't make the world a better place. One more kid without hope.

PETER

I don't need to read to play hockey.

MARTA

But you do to read a love poem to your girlfriend, or read a book to your kids someday. Or read a lease a find out your landlord is cheating you. Or see your own name in the paper, or read the inscription on the Heisman trophy—

PETER

The what?

MARTA

The Heisman trophy!

PETER

That's football!

MARTA

You know what I mean.

PETER

It's the Stanley Cup.

MARTA

I told you basketball's my sport—

PETER

Heisman trophy...

MARTA

Does your coach push you this hard? Do you give him that attitude? Or do you say, "you're right, let me try that move again." How will you get recruited if you don't stay in school?

PETER

You sound just like my mother!

MARTA

Well, what do you think you're Mom wants for you?

PETER

She's a great person. And a great Mom.

MARTA

I'm sure she is.

PETER

She never finished school. She just worked hard so that I could have a better life. She wants the best for me.

MARTA

What's that?

PETER

That thing you said about hope—about not having hope—I know what that's like. Sitting in a classroom pretending I know what's on the board. Finding ways to get my friends to tell me what

was in the reading assignment. Even in a restaurant—you know I always order a burger. I don't even like burgers but I always know I can get one without reading the menu. I'm so sick of making excuses. Faking. Feeling like there's no hope for me. Like hockey is my only shot.

MARTA

Takes out the Frederick Douglass book. This is hope.

PETER

So.

MARTA

So. What do you want?

PETER

I want to know what happened to Frederick Douglass.

MARTA

It's right here.

PETER

He picks up the book You think there's hope for me?

MARTA

I do.

PETER

Okay coach. Let's get to work.

He opens the book.

Reflect and Connect: “You Can Do All Things” Classroom Activity

After reading aloud or performing the scenes from the play and discussing how Marta helped Peter overcome his struggles with dyslexia, have your students complete the following activity to “act out” their own personal success stories.

Activity Time: 1 class period.

- Have students fill out the worksheet on page 22 of this Study Guide. Ask them to think carefully about very descriptive words based around moments of struggle in their lives.
- Ask students to stand in a circle. Instruct students to take a moment to picture themselves in their moment of struggle. Tell them in a moment you are going to ask them to become statues that represent their feelings at this moment. They should think of a frozen pose they can hold that portrays their struggle.
- Have students turn around, so they are facing away from the circle. Count to three- on the count of three, all students should turn in at the same time and strike their pose.
- Now ask students to think of a title for this image. Encourage students to create one-word titles. The title could be descriptive, or it could be what they were thinking.
- Ask students to face away from the circle again. Repeat the process of counting to three. This time when students turn around and strike their pose, they should also say out loud the title for this image.
- Invite volunteers to share their images and titles one at a time.
- Repeat the entire process again, this time instead of an image of their moment of struggle, ask students to create images of themselves at a moment of success.

How Do You Spell Hope?

Study Guide Worksheet

Think about a time in your life when you struggled with something the way Peter, Marta and Frederick Douglass all struggled in their lives.

Name: _____

What is something in your life that you have struggled with? Think of a personal obstacle or something that was difficult for you:

What made this situation a struggle? _____

Who is someone who helped you succeed? _____

What did this person do? _____

What did you have to do yourself to succeed? _____

What is one word to describe how you felt while you were struggling?

What is one word to describe how you felt when you succeeded?

Reflect and Connect: Write a Review

After your students have seen the show *How Do You Spell Hope?* ask them to be theater critics and write a review of the show. Here are some questions you can use as prompts in your writing:

- What was the most compelling or intriguing aspect of the production you saw?
- What questions did you have about *How Do You Spell Hope?* or what was something that confused you?
- Can you make any connections between this play and other plays you have seen? Between the play and books you have read or movies you have seen? Between the play and something from your own life?
- If you could speak with the playwright, the director or one of the actors, what would you say? What are some things you would discuss?

We love to hear from students and teachers who have come to see shows at Central Square Theater. If your students have written a review of the show or generated any other work based on their experiences at the theater, please send work to:

Central Square Theater
ATTN: Education
450 Massachusetts Ave
Cambridge, MA 02139

Or e-mail work to edu@undergroundrailwaytheater.org

Resources for Further Study

Purcell-Gates. *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995.

Landau, Elaine. *Dyslexia*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1991.

Meltzer, Milton. *Frederick Douglass In His Own Words*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995.

Savage, John. *Dyslexia: Understanding Reading Problems*. New York: Julian Messner, 1985.

The National Association of Bilingual Education:
<http://www.nabe.org>

The International Dyslexic Association
<http://www.interdys.org>

LDTeens.org
<http://ldteens.org>
Website about learning disabilities designed by teens

The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave
<http://www.history.rochester.edu/class/douglass/douglas11.txt>