



DELAWARE
THEATRE
COMPANY

INSIGHTS

DTC's Teacher Resource



A Sign of the Times

Book by Bruce Vilanch
Story created by Richard J. Robin
Delaware Theatre Company
November 28--December 23, 2018

A Character's Journey

"It's what I want to do. I want to take pictures. There's so much going on in the world. . . . And I refuse to be left out of it just because I'm a woman. If I can create a whole baby, I can create a picture that will mean something. I want to help make a change. I want to be in the middle of things that matter."

--Cindy, from the musical *A Sign of the Times*
(Book by Bruce Vilanch; story created by Richard J. Robin)



Women's march for equality through Washington, DC.

INSIGHTS

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Delaware Theatre Company

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**40th Season
2018-2019**

A SIGN OF THE TIMES

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Delaware Division of the Arts



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Characters and Summary

A Note to Readers: To assist educators in preparing their students for seeing our shows, the Department of Education and Community Engagement at DTC prepares and shares detailed summaries of the plots of our productions. These summaries disclose important plot points, including the climax and resolution of each play. Furthermore, our study guides are constructed under the premise that the educator has read our summary, and additional articles herein may reference these same plot points. This notice is intended to provide a “spoiler alert.” In addition, this production of A Sign of the Times is newly revised, and the summary and descriptions herein reflect the information in the draft from the first rehearsal on 10/30/18. Revisions that occurred throughout the rehearsal process prior to the show’s opening may not be reflected in this study guide.

Characters

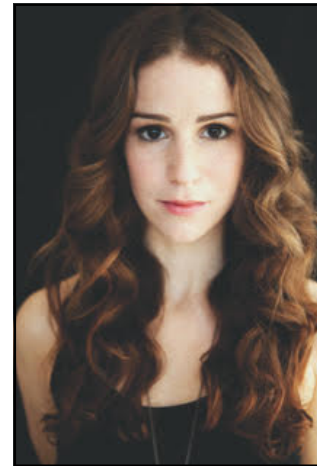
Cindy is an ambitious young woman in her twenties, a talented photographer who wants to use her skills to help change the world. She leaves her small town in Ohio for New York City, and in the process of beginning her new life there, learns what is important to her, what battles she chooses to fight, and whom she wants to be.

Matt is in his twenties and works in the local automotive plant. He wants longtime girlfriend Cindy to marry him and settle down, but has a different world view from Cindy. He is eventually drafted into the army and sent to Vietnam, which helps him develop a sense of responsibility and purpose.

Aunt Cleo is in her mid 40s and has raised Cindy since her parents’ deaths. She is an unconventional free spirit, an aging hippie. She supports, both emotionally and financially, Cindy’s somewhat hasty decision to move to New York City. .

Tanya is in her early 30s and is street smart and sassy, living in Greenwich Village. She becomes a political activist when she becomes romantically involved with Dennis, yet wants the liberation of pursuing her own dreams and livelihood rather than being compartmentalized or categorized.

Brian is in his mid to late 30s. He is a very successful and charming advertising executive who enjoys being the center of women’s attention. Though he initially supports Cindy’s career dreams and eventually becomes her boyfriend, he has difficulty building deep personal relationships, preferring the social customs of the time that support his interests and fancies.



Chilina Kennedy plays Cindy in DTC’s production of A Sign of the Times.

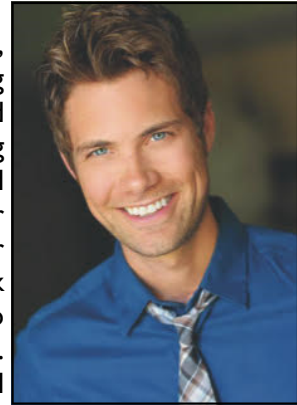


Crystal Lucas-Perry plays the character of Tanya in A Sign of the Times.

Characters and Summary (continued)

Summary

Act I: The play opens in 1965 with a montage of life in small Midwest town, Centerville, Ohio. Cindy is seen at her Aunt Cleo's kitchen table viewing slides of her photos. She takes a break, turns on the TV, and is inundated with advertising of the age. She pauses to watch a news report of the opening of the new Metropolitan Opera house in New York City. Her boyfriend Matt enters and jokes about her photography. Cindy asserts that this is her work. Matt proposes marriage, but Cindy tells him she wants to use her talents to make a change in the world. He leaves for work telling her to think of his offer. Cindy's Aunt Cleo enters, and Cindy tells her of her plans to move to New York to take photos documenting the changes in the world. Aunt Cleo offers her her blessing and a generous monetary gift to help fund her move.



Drew Seeley plays boy friend Matt in A Sign of the Times at DTC.

Cindy lands in New York and tours the sites. She is enchanted by her first glimpse of the diverse denizens of the city, including Arthur Ashe, Petula Clark, Bob Dylan, and Andy Warhol. In her quest for a place to live, Cindy meets Tanya, an African-American and New York native. They strike a deal, and Cindy and Tanya become roommates and fast friends.

Searching for a job, Cindy is confronted with blatant sexism against women. She deals with men who belittle her during interviews. After one frustrating interview, Cindy trips and falls into the arms of Brian, a handsome executive, who pays her an unwelcome compliment. As she storms out, she drops her wallet. Brian picks it up and notices numerous photos inside that get his approval.

Cindy returns to her apartment and complains to Tanya about her experiences. Tanya decides Cindy needs a night on the town, and they head to a dance bar. As the women talk there, Tanya suggests that if Cindy wants to get hired, she needs to get people's attention. She demonstrates by stepping onto the club's stage and singing a spirited solo. Cindy and Tanya then move to the dance floor where Cindy bumps into Brian, who recognizes her, gives her her wallet back, and offers her a job at the advertising agency where he works.

The next morning, Cindy and Tanya talk about advertising and about Brian as a potential coworker and romantic interest. Dennis, a young man who lives in Tanya's building, bounds on stage carrying protest signs. He introduces himself to Cindy and invites her to a demonstration he plans to attend. Both Cindy and Tanya join him in a series of marches calling attention to important issues of the day: Civil Rights, Women's Rights, and the Vietnam War.



Steven Grant Douglas plays Dennis.

During the protests, Dennis is injured. While Cindy and Tanya are treating him, Cindy gets a call from Matt, her boyfriend from Ohio. He tells her that he's been drafted and wants to know if he can see her on his way to basic training. Matt runs out of money and he is disconnected. Before he can call back, Brian calls to tell Cindy that an agency that provides pictures to magazines is interested in her photographs.

(continued)

Characters and Summary (continued)

Summary (continued)

Act II: Cindy and Brian are now romantically involved, as are Tanya and Dennis. Cindy decides to take a job with an ad agency, attracted by a salary that will allow her more independent. Brian reacts to her announcement by suggesting she move in with him. She responds that even if she lived with him, she would pay her share of the rent.

Three months pass. Cindy and Tanya are discussing their romantic relationships. Cindy admits that Matt seems to be out of the picture since being drafted. Brian, on the other hand, continues to suggest that Cindy move in with him. She is not sure that would be such a good idea since she is not convinced Brian loves her. Later, in Brian's apartment, Cindy and Brian discuss the fidelity needed to make a strong relationship. Brian agrees that Cindy is the only person with whom he is interested in building such a partnership.

In a Chinese restaurant, Tanya and Dennis discuss their differences. Tanya is African American and from Harlem, a predominately black section of New York City. Dennis is Jewish and from Scarsdale, an affluent, predominantly white small town located outside of New York City. Dennis asserts he wants to make the world equitable and fair. Tanya admits that she wants to live in a place where she can be herself, with no one judging her. She tell Dennis about a time she and her brother went to visit a white girl he was interested in dating and were made to feel dangerously unwelcome. Tanya explains that that was the pivotal moment that directed her desire to find a place where it wouldn't matter what color she is.

It is the end of the workday at Cindy's agency, where the executives, exclusively male, illustrate various examples of male chauvinism and misogyny. Cindy actively tries to right the injustices but is fired for her efforts. When shares her bad news with Brian, he offers her a job at his ad agency. He also tells her that he has a friend who is interested in exhibiting her photos in his gallery.

During a reception at the gallery, Brian has too much to drink, flirts with other women, and argues with Cindy about other woman and about his drinking once they get home. He changes the subject and talks about how many times he has had to defend her in her effort to change the status quo. He tells her he is tired of standing up for her.

While distributing pamphlets, Tanya and Dennis argue about Dennis's seemingly never-ending battle to right all the injustice in the world. Tanya accuses him of hiding behind his causes as a way to escape from his authentic self, which is the person with whom she is interested in building a relationship. He tells her that he has no choice but to follow his quest and she is free to join him or not. She leaves him without responding.

Cindy is waiting at home for Brian, who once again is late. While she waits, she reads a letter from Matt, who writes from Vietnam and again asks her to marry him and return to Ohio. Late that same night, a tipsy Brian is seen in the amorous company of a woman he met at Hugo's galley. Meanwhile, Dennis and Tanya, who are both wandering the city thinking of each other, meet and reconcile.

Brian returns to his apartment early the next day to find Cindy packed and ready to leave. Brian admits that he thought Cindy was the one who was going to make him settle down. The two argue, and she decides to move out and to quit her job at Brian's agency.

Characters and Summary (continued)

Summary (continued)

Cindy returns to Tanya's apartment to tell her that her relationship with Brian has ended. Matt arrives to tell Cindy that he has decided to make the army his career and he wants Cindy to be his wife. Cindy tells him she is not the same person she was back in Ohio and that she can't accomplish her life's goals as an army wife. They part with a final kiss.

The final scene is a montage illustrating what the future holds in store for the main characters. Tanya and Dennis are together and continue their political activism. Matt finds happiness in the future as a husband and father. Cindy becomes a successful photographer who has chosen, at least for the moment, to remain single while she focuses on making a difference in the world through her work.



Lyndon Johnson, with Martin Luther King, Jr. looking on, signs the Civil Rights Act.

An Interview with the Playwright

Delaware Theatre Company's Associate Director of Education & Community Engagement, Johanna Schloss (JS), interviewed Bruce Vilanch (BV), who wrote the book (script) for *A Sign of the Times*. In the interview, Vilanch shared the story of his creative path in writing the show, as well as his comments about living in the 1960s and about being a long-time television writer.

JS: How did you become involved in writing the book for *A Sign of the Times*?

BV: My agent actually sent me the proposal! When you write for a living, most of the time you're the one doing the proposing. So it's always a red letter day when your agent says "There's a producer wondering if you're interested in writing this." Producer is the key word. They write, too -- checks! So a proposal from a producer is always a wonderful thing. In this case, our producer had an idea to tell a '60s story using real '60s music whose performing rights he had already acquired. He had a treatment, which is an outline of the plot with character descriptions. The story spoke to me -- I had come of age at the same time as his central character and I knew and loved ALL the music. So he pretty much had me at hello.



Bruce Vilanch, who wrote the book for A Sign of the Times.

JS: What elements of the 1960s did you think were important to include in this show?

BV: The '60s were the revolutionary period where the baby boomers -- the children of the generation that had fought World War II and established the *Happy Days* world -- rejected the values and politics with which they had grown up. The war in Vietnam, which we viewed as old people sending young people to die for no palpable reason, was the triggering factor, but a rejection of old-school social practices -- like no sex before marriage, the idea of marriage altogether, and the segregation of the races played a larger personal role. The central character in our show moves from Central Ohio, where I attended college, to New York City and discovers life lived on a much larger scale than she had ever known. She also enters the world of *MAD MEN*, filled with the objectification of women, which was commonplace. I needed to make sure those social changes were reflected in her story and that her changing attitudes would mirror what was happening to most of the people her age. And I had to make sure all that seriousness was fun and exciting, as well as respectful of the guys who went off to fight that war.

JS: We have student playwrights of all ages—from grade-schoolers to groups of senior citizens—who confess to feeling anxious or disappointed when they realize that early drafts are not “finished products.” We encourage them and remind them that professional writers also rewrite and revise. Can you share how the book for this play has evolved, or what you look for when you are looking at what needs revising?

BV: Everyone's goal as a writer is to get to the position where you never have to write a second draft. But it never happens. Oh, maybe for David Mamet or Woody Allen, but I'm guessing that, even though they completely control their material and have the last word, they've got a few trusted people who find a copy of the script in a plain brown wrapper in the mailbox with a blank page at the end for any notes they might want to give their old pal. Neil Simon once said to me -- there, was

(continued)

An Interview with the Playwright (continued)

that drop loud enough? -- "There is no writing. There is only rewriting." Like me, he started in the writing rooms of television shows, where everybody gets to gang up on everybody else's material. So nothing is ever finished. One of the nice things about writing for a live audience is that you can feel what works and change what doesn't. It's much more expensive to do that on film. Screenwriters spend a lot of time crossing their fingers and hoping what's funny on the set is funny at the mall. If you think Shakespeare never changed a line because an actor couldn't pronounce a word, you're living on the wrong planet.

JS: You are known for your sharp humor and ability to write jokes for others to say. Do you find any of the characters in the show particularly fun to write dialogue for, or who can be vehicles for comedy? If so, which ones?

BV: I like all the characters in this show, but I think Tanya is my favorite because she is based on a real friend of mine who lived the complex and unusual philosophy that the character professes. And she gets to be just as wild as she wants to be. Aunt Cleo is my runner-up. Cindy was the most difficult because she is smart, but a square peg in the round hole of Central Ohio. She gets to blossom in New York, but it's not all the dream she expected it would be.

JS: Can you share some of your thoughts about the collaborative nature of theatre (and/or of creating a new musical)? What, if anything, has struck your interest, asked you to work in a different way, and/or been fun or exciting?

BV: Musicals are the most collaborative of all the theatrical arts because so many disciplines get involved. The story in a musical can be told in different ways -- a plot point might be dealt with in a dance, or a song or nothing involving the libretto at all, but the libretto has been used to set it up. So that moment is the province of every member of the creative team, and that's even before costumes, sets, lights, make-up, sound, hair and the newest member of the squad -- projections! The creatives on this show are extraordinarily talented, but also friendly, team-oriented and patient with each other. That doesn't happen all the time. But I'm thrilled that it is happening for us. Who wants to be sitting in a rehearsal hall with a view of the Acela train, the one that you're wishing you were on?



Chilina Kennedy, who plays Cindy, and the cast and creative team of Delaware Theatre Company's production of A Sign of the Times, rehearse at DTC. The wall behind the cast features an array of images depicting the sets and costume concepts for the show.

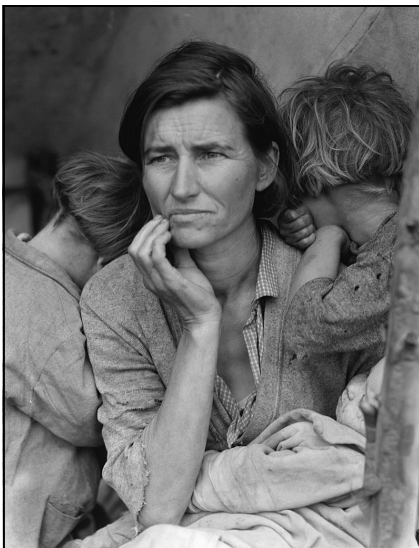
Teachable Themes and Topics

Photojournalism: Every Picture Tells a Story

In *A Sign of the Times*, our lead character, Cindy, wants to use her passion for photography to seek out and tell important stories. Though she lands a job taking pictures for an advertising agency, Cindy prefers using her camera to record, through photographs, the real-life concerns of the people she encounters in New York in the 1960s. Indeed, the job of a photojournalist is to document reality. Compared to the slickly designed photographs that advertise a world of new products or promote a brand identity, a photo taken by a photojournalist reveals an unvarnished moment in time. Photojournalists attempt to capture the truth as they see it unfolding in the real world around them rather than composing or manipulating an image as an artist might for aesthetic appeal. In doing so, they offer to the broader world a glimpse of history or a perspective of an anonymous human being. Our protagonist, Cindy, explains her goal, saying, “I want to show people what’s going on in the world, not just what’s picturesque.”

Nineteenth-century American photographer Mathew Brady is often referred to as the “father of photo journalism.” His work in photographing, and thus documenting, the people, places, and events of the Civil War was unparalleled at the time. During the 1850s, Brady had been working in Washington D.C. as a portrait photographer; however, after the outbreak of the war, Brady decided to hire and supervise a team of photographers, including Alexander Gardner and George Barnard, to document the events on the battlefield. These photographers often risked their own lives while doing so; Brady and his associates were themselves imperiled while trying to set up their cameras and equipment during the Battle of Bull Run. Brady’s exhibit of photographs from Antietam brought home to the American people the horrors of war.

But the scope of photojournalism expanded beyond wartime, with new advances in technology allowing the taking of indoor photographs without setting up large, cumbersome flash equipment. Social reformist Jacob Riis used this new “flash photography” technology to take photographs of people living in poverty in the tenements of late nineteenth-century New York to bring attention to the needs of the poor. Through his photographs, Riis expanded public awareness of the living conditions of everyday people and even drew the attention of Theodore Roosevelt, who praised his work as it related to social justice issues.



Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother"

Women, too, were pioneers in the photojournalism industry. During the Great Depression, photographer Dorothea Lange was hired by the Farm Security Administration to document the impact of the broken economy on the people—those in rural areas as well as men and women who were homeless and hungry in cities across the country. Her photograph of “White Angel Breadline” highlighted one man in a sea of others waiting for food. And one of the most iconic pictures of the era, “Migrant Mother,” revealed to all Americans the plight of children and families who were suffering. Lange said of her subject, “I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that

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Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

Photojournalism: Every Picture Tells a Story (continued)

they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.” Lange and other FSA-sponsored photojournalists offered their photos free to newspapers to share, through poignant images, the very real impact of the Great Depression on humanity.

Another acclaimed photojournalist was Margaret Bourke-White, whose work included the first cover of *LIFE* magazine (a weekly publication highlighting, mostly through photographs, the newsworthy, the political, and the cultural segments that caught the public’s attention at the time). In addition to her work for *LIFE*, she was known for her photographs that documented events of World War II. Photojournalists of that time followed the action while simultaneously being immersed in it. And although many striking photos were taken showing the aftermath of a battle, other pictures captured the action as it occurred. Bourke-White was in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow when the city was attacked by the Germans. Throughout the war, she traveled with many units in the U.S. military, eventually accompanying General George Patton to Buchenwald, where she documented the atrocities of the concentration camps through her camera lens. Another such wartime photographer, Therese Bonney, committed her efforts to documenting the impact of World War II in Europe, particularly its effect on children, and hoped that through her work, she could build ties between the people of France and the United States. She wrote of her experiences, “I go forth alone, try to get the truth and then bring it back and try to make others face it and do something about it.”

Many of the photographs shown in the projections of *A Sign of the Times* were those taken by photojournalists in the 1960s who were documenting the events of the day. Photos of Civil Rights leaders, of protests over social inequality, of wartime conflict, and even of pop culture icons are projected both to remind audiences of the real people and issues at the center of the decade and to underscore Cindy’s desire to use her skills to bring to light those people and issues as these images are captured by the camera lens and shared with the public. The story, though imagined, has roots in reality. Photojournalists have contributed immensely to our understanding of our history through their pictures. Their ability to capture the immense beauty or haunting sorrow in the life of another human being allows us to connect with people we’ve never met. In *A Sign of the Times*, our characters are all looking for a way to connect with someone else, and to feel that this connection is in some way bringing a positive change to the world.



Protesters in 1964 urge voting rights for all.

Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

Who Am I? Identity and Individuality

As the show opens, a young woman from the Midwest, Cindy, grapples with expectations placed on her as they collide with her own dreams as she sings, “I close my eyes and I can fly/ And I escape from all this worldly strife/ Restricted by routine of life/ But still I can’t discover who am I?” Later in the show, her friend Tanya explains to her boyfriend Dennis that she does not want her whole existence to be about protests about inequality, saying, “I didn’t move here to start a movement. I moved here to be me, to be whoever I wanted to be with nobody judging me.” Cindy, who is white, and Tanya, who is black, both seek to better know and share themselves in a world that at times asks them to fit a certain mold and behave a certain way. As women, as women of different races, as women from different backgrounds and with different goals, they share a similar dilemma—how to be true to themselves when outside influences are telling them who they should be.

The process of discovering who each of us is as an individual is a lifelong journey. As each of us grows, has new experiences, learns, and changes, our own sense of self-identity may also grow and change. And because no two persons are exactly alike, we all bring a unique history and perspective to the table when seeking to understand ourselves and others. Ask a woman to define herself, and she may offer adjectives or nouns such as “college-educated” or “a marketing specialist” or “a mother” or “die-hard football fan.” She may also use words denoting racial or ethnic identity—“black” or “Irish,” for example, or religious affiliation—“strict Baptist.” Men, too, do this, and their jobs, family status, and cultural backgrounds also make the list of definers. As the show illustrates, though, sometimes conflict erupts internally or interpersonally as people are asked to claim a point of view similar to others who use the same descriptor in self-identity, or questioned as to why they will or will not take on the mantle of others who, having a similar traits or backgrounds, are making certain choices or fighting for a specific cause.



World War II-era propaganda poster depicting the strength and contribution of American women

A working woman in the 1960s may have been faced with conflicting messages and outside pressures about her choices and value to society. During World War II, many American women joined the workforce in jobs previously known as men’s work; women drove trucks, manufactured airplanes, analyzed chemicals in laboratories, and other jobs not considered “pink collar” (those jobs previously thought of as women’s domain—nurses and teachers, for example). Posters, radio commercials, and even political propaganda saluted women for their strength and abilities in keeping the country afloat and supporting the war effort. But after that war ended, many of these women lost their jobs as men returned to claim them. Some women who continued to work realized that their pay scale was significantly reduced below that of men’s salaries for doing the same job. Advertising campaigns in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s no longer emphasized Rosie the Riveter and other strong women out in the workforce; instead, the common image was a woman in a domestic situation—wife, mother, homemaker. Media images as well as real practices in business and industry projected a much more limited scope of what women could or should be

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Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

Who Am I? Identity and Individuality (continued)

doing. As the 1960s dawned, though, pressure from women's organizations, grassroots efforts, and even a groundbreaking (and bestselling) book *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan spoke to the demand for and by women to be viewed with a wider lens than just as being suited for domestic or subordinate roles.

Cindy's journey of self-discovery, of coming into her own, is wrapped in the swirl of the 1960s. The play introduces her as a woman who might be labeled "Matt's girlfriend," "shopkeeper," and "hobbyist photographer." Yet she recognizes there is more to her than these labels, and she chooses a new path and pursues her dreams of being a professional and respected photographer and claiming a sense of independence and self-reliance. Her relationships with men personally and professionally help her recognize even more that she is capable of determining her own worth. Tanya, too, explores who she is, recalling with sadness her experience with social taboos about interracial relationships hurting her brother, and her desire to live according to her own rules rather than those imposed on her by society. Multifaceted, too, she seeks to be seen not only as a black woman, but as a person with her own opinions, desires, and plans, an individual who wants to drive her life the way she chooses.

These two characters, though fictional, mirror the stories of many women of the 1960s in the way they felt they had to break free from social constraints to live authentically. Even today, women—and men—are faced with the dilemma of standing up for who they are and exploring their senses of self in the face of outside critique. The critiques of the 1960s may have been pressures from close family and friends, social mores, or even legal or bureaucratic hurdles. Today, though some of those hurdles have been removed, the weighing in and judgements that occur over social media—sometimes from complete strangers—can cause a person to rethink what they share about themselves with the outside world. Cindy and Tanya's stories reveal that it takes courage, and sometimes sacrifice, to identify, develop, and be your true self.

Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

Signs of the Times

The characters of Tanya and Dennis in *A Sign of the Times* invite Cindy to an array of demonstrations meant to shed light on social causes and promote change. In one of the key musical numbers of the show, the ensemble carries picket signs with words and symbols on them promoting their concerns and calls to action. Here are a few examples and explanations of the messages emblazoned on those signs.

**Equality
For
Women**

The show depicts the sexism Cindy—and other women—faced, especially in the workplace, during the 1960s. This sign promotes not only the concept of equal opportunity and pay for women in the workforce, but also reminds the audience of some of the social injustices faced by our main character and women of the 1960s in general. During the 1960s, the fight for equal pay and fair labor practices led to the Equal Pay Act of 1963, signed into law by President John F. Kennedy. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, and specifically Title VII under that act, was signed by President Lyndon Johnson, and prohibited discrimination in the workplace based on gender as well as race, religion, or national origin. The women's rights movement—often classified as a “second wave” of the movement, following the long battle from the previous century towards women's suffrage—gained momentum during the 1960s, and the National Organization for Women (NOW) was formed in 1966 to continue bringing issues facing women to the forefront.

**BRING OUR
BOYS HOME**



These messages reveal the sentiments of those citizens opposed to the war in Vietnam. Much of the opposition was due to differing points of view on the political nature and necessity of the war itself; much was indicative of some citizens' general opposition to all war. And embedded with these issues was a strong belief that the involuntary conscription—also known as “the draft”—of young men into the military was unjust and/or morally wrong. Deferments from the military were offered for men who were enrolled full-time in college. Critics of the draft pointed out the fact that mostly middle- to upper-class families could afford to send their sons to college full-time, whereas those from working class families or impoverished backgrounds could not afford tuition, so were less likely to be able to obtain a deferment. Likewise, those from economically disadvantaged families may not have had the same access to medical care as young men from middle and upper class families, and thus would not have had the supporting medical records detailing any physical conditions that might have resulted in a deferment. And because so many who fought the war in Vietnam were truly teenagers, and so many young men died in combat, there was a prevalent feeling that these were boys sent to fight an unpopular war, one that the nation was not backing in the unified way it had during World War II.

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Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

Signs of the Times (continued)



This abbreviation stands for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The group was founded in 1960 by young people who chose not to affiliate themselves with other religious, social, or civic organizations, but who wanted to affect change through “nonviolent direct action,” such as through organizing demonstrations about Civil Rights issues and taking part in the Freedom Rides in the South to challenge Jim Crow laws and practices on public transportation. The group, though strong in the early 1960s, eventually disbanded due to internal discord regarding membership, philosophy, and affiliations with other Civil Rights organizations and leaders.

**I Am
A Man**

These words are used as a civil rights declaration of the dignity of all human beings. This sign is linked directly to the Memphis Sanitation Workers’ Strike of 1968, in which the workers—all African-American men—challenged the unfair wages and unsafe practices they faced. Yet the words have a historical link to the abolitionist movement in America before the Revolutionary War. Later, in the early 19th century, the Dred Scott case used the phrase “Am I Not a Man?” to emphasize the injustice of Scott’s being treated as property in the decision to not allow his freedom. In present day, “I Am a Man” as a declaration of civil rights has been used in the United States and in other countries and their home languages as an expression of a desire for justice, such as during the 2010 Arab Spring uprising.

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Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

Signs of the Times (continued)

Voting Rights For Negroes

The sign reading “Voting Rights for Negroes” calls attention to one of the largest issues of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s—that of the discrimination against African Americans who were denied the right to vote in local and national elections. That denial, which came in the form of bureaucratic interference such as demanding that African Americans pass literacy tests or pay poll taxes, or in the form of threats and intimidation in the community, was the norm rather than the exception in many Southern states. Through community activism in the form of political pressure and popular protest, everyday citizens effected change, persuading Congress to establish the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson (whose own political savvy contributed to the movement of the Act through Congress). This law specifically acts to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, and allows for federal examiners to register citizens to vote in local jurisdictions across the country. Within a few months of the Voting Rights Act’s establishment, over a quarter million African Americans were registered to vote, many of whom were previously denied their rights.

WE SHALL OVERCOME

The words “We shall overcome” are the first words in the same-titled gospel song that became a civil rights anthem in the 1960s and later. The song has its roots in a gospel song “I’ll Overcome Some Day,” by Charles Tindley, that was adapted and sung by striking tobacco workers in 1945 in North Carolina. The song came to the attention of union organizer Zilphia Horton and folk singer Pete Seeger, who included it in his *People’s Songs Bulletin*, and began singing it publicly at rallies and folk festivals in the early 1960s. It soon became standard repertoire of folk singers and social activists of the age, and was sung by a young Joan Baez in 1963 in front of the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom—the very event at which Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech. In the ensuing years, the song and the phrase continued to be used to call attention to civil rights causes; to promote racial, religious, and gender equality; and to bring both a musical and spiritual element to events celebrating peace and justice. In 2009 at the inauguration of President Barack Obama, one spectator held up a sign saying, “We Have Overcome.”

Questions for Classroom Discussion

Knowledge and Comprehension

1. What is Cindy's life like in her home town? What does she want to do with her life?
2. Who is Matt? What does he want from Cindy?
3. How is life in New York different for Cindy?
4. Who is Tanya? What does she want from her life?
5. Who is Brian? What does Cindy like about him? What bothers her about him? What bothers Brian about Cindy?
6. Why do Tanya and Dennis argue at the restaurant?
7. What decision does Cindy make about her love life at the end of the play? What is important to her?

Application and Analysis

1. How are Brian and Matt different? How are they similar?
2. What is Dennis trying to accomplish with his demonstrations and protests? What is happening in society that he is trying to change?
3. How does Cindy grow during the course of the show?
4. Why does Tanya tell the story about her brother and his former girlfriend? How does that story connect with her current life choices?

Synthesis and Evaluation

1. Which songs do you think really helped tell the story? Why do you think they worked so well?
2. What cultural, political, or social hallmarks of the 1960s came to the forefront during the show?
3. What connections, if any, did you make between events or circumstances of the 1960s and today's society?

Classroom Activities

1. Select an important historical event from the past 100 years. On your own or with a group, collect and examine eight photographs of that event taken by different photographers. What impression of the event do you get from each individual photograph? What story was that photographer telling? What overall impression about the event do you get from taking into consideration the photos as a collection? Create a multimedia slideshow or other visual representation to share with your class, highlighting the way the stories of the photos can be interpreted individually and as part of a larger group. Do your impressions seem to mesh with the stories as you knew them before? Was there anything about the photos that changed your perspective on the event that transpired?

2. Select a photojournalist of your own choosing or from the list below and research his/her life and career. What iconic stories, images, or experiences is this person known for? What was his/her philosophy on their work or reason for doing what they did? Share your findings in a presentation for your class.

Mathew Brady
Dorothea Lange
Margaret Bourke-White
Therese Bonney
Lynsey Addario
Akili-Casundria Ramsess

3. With your classmates, create a title or theme for a group photo story, such as “Behind the Scenes at our School” or “Random Acts of Kindness.” Using digital cameras, spend several days taking photos that support this theme; then with your class, play the role of editor and select some of the most telling pictures that have been taken. How difficult is it to choose only certain pictures? What stories do some of the photographers feel are most important? Publish your photo stories on a school or class website, or print them and create an exhibition for your school commons or other area.

4. Create a collage or other visual/graphic presentation that features pictures or words that represent a part of your identity. Examples could include gender, race, ethnicity, heritage, languages spoken, school, job, religion, interests, goals, etc. Examine your collage and compare and contrast yours to those of your classmates. What facets of your identity do you have in common with one another? Is there anyone in your class exactly like you in terms of identity? Can you find at least one commonality between you and each individual in your classroom? (Not necessarily the same one across the board, but something you have in common with Classmate A and another thing you have in common with Classmate B, etc.?) Discuss your impressions of self-identity descriptors and a person’s sense of wholeness with your classmates.

(continued)

Classroom Activities *(continued)*

5. Examine a piece of landmark legislation from the 1960s in depth. What events from the months or years close to that legislation's passing led to its being written and moved through Congress? What events possibly from long before contributed to the need for such legislation? Who were some of the people who spoke out or took action along the way? Create a timeline with pictures and explanations that track the issue at hand and its evolution from problem to resolution. After sharing with your class, open a discussion of one another's views on how that legislation is affecting contemporary American society. What has changed for the better? Are there any negative repercussions? Is there still room for improvement?

6. On your own or with a group, select a contemporary issue that affects your life today or the world you care about. If you had to describe what the problem looked like visually, what words might you use? If you could explain the issue or offer solutions, what words would you use to do so? Using these words and phrases as inspiration, write a song (or the lyrics, at least) that captures the spirit or images you are trying to convey. Record your song and play it for your class, or share your lyrics in written or spoken form.

7. Choose a musical artist or a genre of music you like and know well, then create a list of five songs from that artist or genre with lyrics that are meaningful to you. Consider these lyrics as if they might be part of a story. What kind of character might sing or say these words? What might be happening in that character's life that would cause him or her (or them) to sing these words? Try to create a set of characters and simple storyline for them that could incorporate these songs. Share your inspiration for this new "musical treatment" with your classmates, perhaps telling the story and playing the songs as the story unfolds.



First rehearsal at Delaware Theatre Company for A Sign of the Times

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Page 5—Lyndon Johnson signing Civil Rights Act with Martin Luther King, Jr. present. Author: Cecil Stoughton. Public domain. Accessed at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lyndon_Johnson_signing_Civil_Rights_Act,_July_2,_1964.jpg

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Page 7—Chilina Kennedy, cast, and creative team rehearsing. Photo by Ann Marley of Delaware Theatre Company.

Page 8—“Migrant Mother.” Photo by Dorothea Lange. Farm Security Administration, 1936. Public domain. Accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorothea_Lange#/media/File:Lange-MigrantMother02.jpg. Available at [Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division](https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/) under the digital ID [fsa.8b29516](https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/).

Page 9—Protesters carrying signs at Civil Rights demonstration, 1964. Author: Warren K. Leffler. Library of Congress. No known restrictions. Accessed at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1964_DNC_protest_05246u.jpg.

Page 10—We Can Do It! Poster. Artist: J. Howard Miller. From the collection of the National Museum of American History. Public domain. Accessed at https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=world+war+ii+propaganda+rosie&title=Special%3ASearch&go=Go#/media/File:We_Can_Do_It!.jpg.

Page 17—First rehearsal at Delaware Theatre Company. Photo by Ann Marley of Delaware Theatre Company.

Why Go to the Theatre?

State and National Education Standards Addressed Through Taking Your Students to a Live Theatre Production

When your students view live theatre, they are taking part in a learning experience that engages their minds on many levels. From simple recall and comprehension of the plot of a play or musical to analysis and evaluation of the production elements of a show, students receive and interpret messages communicated through words, movement, music, and other artistic devices. Beyond “I liked it; it was good,” students learn to communicate about the content and performance of an artistic piece and to reflect on their own and others’ emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual points-of-view and responses. And the immediacy of live theatre--the shared moments between actors and audience members in the here-and-now--raises students’ awareness of the power and scope of human connection.

The following educational standards are addressed in a visit to a performance at Delaware Theatre Company along with a pre-show DTC classroom presentation and post-show talkback session at the theatre. *(Additional standards addressed through the use of the study guide or through further classroom study are not included here.)*

Common Core English Language Arts Standards:

Reading: 9-10 and 11-12, Strands 3, 4, 6

Language: 9-10 and 11-12, Strands 3, 4, and 5

National Core Arts Standards—Theatre:

Responding: Anchor Standards 7, 8, and 9

Connecting: Anchor Standard 11

Delaware Standards for English Language Arts (DOE):

Standard 2: 2.2a, 2.4b1, 2.5b, 2.5g, 2.6a

Standard 3: 3.1b, 3.3b1, 3.3b2

Standard 4: 4.1a, 4.1b, 4.1c, 4.2f, 4.3a, 4.4b

Compiled by Johanna Schloss, Associate Director of Education & Community Engagement, Delaware Theatre Company, 2016