



Black Theatre
Workshop
Study Guide

PIRATE AND THE LONE VOICE

by Donna-Michelle St. Bernard

2025 Tour

Play Summary

Two friends, known only as “Pirate” and “Lone Voice,” launch an underground pirate-radio station amidst a tense social climate. As the government begins to crack down on airwave regulations, the pair must find a way to continue to bring great tunes and relevant news to their community. This playful and witty show serves as part of Donna-Michelle St. Bernard’s *54-Ology* series—a collection of plays inspired by the 54 countries in Africa. *Pirate and the Lone Voice* highlights Guinea Bissau.

Characters

Pirate — The engineer of the operation, Lone Voice’s best friend

Lone Voice — The voice of the operation, Pirate’s best friend

Playwright



Donna-Michelle St. Bernard, a.k.a. Belladonna the Blest, is an emcee, playwright, and agitator. Her main body of work, the 54ology, includes *The First Stone*, *Sound of the Beast*, *Diggers*, *Give It Up*, *The Smell of Horses*, *Cake*, *A Man A Fish*, *Salome’s Clothes* and *Gas Girls*. Works for young audiences include the META-nominated *Reaching For Starlight*, *The Chariot*, and *Rabbit King of Kenya*. Opera libretti include *Forbidden* (Afarin Mansouri/Tapestry Opera) and *Oubliette* (Ivan Barbotin/Tapestry Opera). She is co-editor with Yvette Nolan of the Playwrights Canada Press *Refractions* anthologies, and editor of *Indian Act: Residential School Plays*.

Director

Lydie Dubuisson is a director, playwright, curator and dramaturg from Tiohtià:ke/ Montreal. Her work examines intersectionality, dystopian reality, collective memory and multilingual creative processes. Over the years, she directed projects with Collectif Potomitan, Les Francos, Just For Laughs, Imago Theatre and Teesri Duniya Theatre. Dubuisson wrote *QUIET/SILENCE*, *SANCTUARY/SANCTUAIRE*, and she co-wrote *BLACKOUT: THE CONCORDIA COMPUTER RIOT* which is published by Playwrights Canada Press. Dubuisson was the first Artistic Associate at Black Theatre Workshop (2020-23) and she is a curator with the Arrival Legacy Project. She made her Stratford Festival debut in 2023 and completed the Langham Director’s Workshop program in 2024. Lydie graduated with distinctions from Concordia University's Theatre Program.



Cast

Mel Pickering is an actor based in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal. She began her stage career in *Camilien Houde – le p'tit gars de Sainte-Marie* with Nouveau Théâtre Expérimental and went on to complete a BFA in Acting at Concordia University. Since then, she has performed with Le Zèbre Jaune, Collectif Potomitan, and HeadEmpty Productions, as well as in several editions of the Montreal Fringe Festival with artist Blxck Cxsper. Her screen credits include the indie thriller *Les Nettoyeurs* (Pink Walls Production). Drawn to layered and vulnerable characters, Mel brings a keen sensitivity to her performances. Alongside her acting, she is developing her voice as a playwright, creating work inspired by human relationships and her Haitian heritage.



Jeremy Lewis is a multidisciplinary artist born and based in Tio'tia:ke, primarily as an actor and an improviser. As a graduate of John Abbott College's Professional Theatre Acting program as well as the National Theatre School of Canada's Acting stream, Jeremy has been able to perform across the country. As a professional actor, Jeremy has performed on the streets of Place-des-Arts in Montreal (*Chant de l'arbre - Toxique Trottoir*, 2023), the Village of Senakw in Vancouver (*Bard on the Beach* 2024 season), and the Redbrick Cafe in Guelph, Ontario (*Guelph Fringe* 2023). Most notably, Jeremy performed in the world premiere of Infinitheatre's *Dominoes* at the Crossroads, earning them two META nominations and one META award for Outstanding emerging artist. As an improviser, they've performed with Tightrope theatre in Vancouver, *Outside Joke* in Winnipeg, and Theatre Ste-Catherine in Montreal.



Crew

Set & Costume Designer - Eo Sharp has been a theatre designer for over twenty-five years working with theatres large and small across Canada: from Fringe Festivals to the Festival Stage of Stratford. Her work has been nominated eleven times for design awards, won another four awards, and has represented Canada at the Prague Quadrennial three times. As an educator, Eo has worked with the National Theatre School of Canada; Black Theatre Workshop's Mentorship Program; Concordia, Bishop's and York University. Eo participated three times in *The Ark*, a National Arts Centre theatre research project. Her career in theatre began as a house and box office manager. She holds a BFA Honours in Art history from the University of Toronto and is a graduate of the National Theatre Schools Design Program.



Sound Designer - Elena Stoodley is a singer, writer, songwriter and sound designer. Born in Tio'tia:ke, Montreal, she has also performed in Cameroon and Congo. Her sound design credits includes *The Mountaintop*, *the Rootless tree*, *Manman LaMer*, *Black Out*. Her most current and recent work was sound designing for *Pipeline*, *Diggers*, *M'appelle Mohamed Ali*, *L'amoure looks something like you* and *S'enjailler*. Her personal projects include the annual recap *Chécké2023* and *Survival Technologies*, at FTA 2024.



Stage Manager - Lia Wright is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada in the Production Design and Technical Arts program. She also has a DEC from John Abbott College with a Specialisation in Technical Theatre and Management. Lia is an emerging Stage Manager and Lighting Designer based in Montreal. She is passionate about sharing relatable stories and creating art that makes people think and question the world we live in. Her time at NTS allowed her to explore and connect to her art in a new and interesting way that makes her excited for her future projects.

Discussion Topics

Radio As Resistance

In *Pirate and the Lone Voice*, the characters are living in Guinea-Bissau, under a government that imposes strict regulations on its people and often enforces these regulations by way of military force. For example, radio content is censored—only certain topics, approved by the government—are allowed to be broadcast. As demonstrated in the play, stations who do not abide by the censorship are raided by soldiers, their equipment destroyed.

This form of censorship has larger, negative repercussions on the community and its people. They are unable to receive the information that pertains to them and improves their quality of life—this includes information such as dealing with a prevalent cholera outbreak.

Pirate & Lone Voice's pirate radio station serves as a form of resistance. They use the skills and tools at their disposal to keep their community informed about best health practices, local protests, police violence, and more—actively challenging the government's censorship.

Radio, and other auditory forms of media, have historically served as an effective form of protest. During the 2019 Chilean protests against social inequality—a time of massive social upheaval—radio served as a crucial source of information, and one that communities trusted more than, say, television. Music has historically served as a form of protest as well. Popular artists such as Bob Dylan, U2 and Green Day, and

even Canadian artists like Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, and Gordon Lightfoot, have performed songs of resistance that spoke to sociopolitical issues in their respective periods. These songs have stood the test of time as powerful forms of protest, even today.

Discussion Questions

1. Can you name any other forms of resistance and/or protest? What makes them effective?
2. What are some of the ways and moments in the play where Pirate & Lone Voice's radio station serves their community? Why is it important to engage in community service, advocacy, or activism? Have you ever engaged in any form of advocacy?
3. Had you known that radio/music could be used as a form of resistance before seeing this play? How has it changed the way you think about media?

Guinea-Bissau's Music & Culture

Guinea-Bissau is a country located in West Africa, which features a varied tapestry of languages, ethnic groups, and cultures. The official language is Portuguese, but many natives speak other languages including Guinea-Bissau Creole, Creole, and a variety of native African languages. Guinea-Bissau is home to more than 20 ethnic groups, and this ethnic diversity is an essential part of the country's identity and culture.

Many musical and dance traditions are also central to cultural life in Guinea-Bissau, including Gumbe, a popular style of music. Gumbe originated in the 18th century, and its history is intertwined with freed slaves who relocated to Jamaica. It is mainly a percussive and vocal style of music, and at the center is the Gumbe drum. This is a square drum big enough for the player to sit on.

Other traditional instruments include the kora (a harp-lute), the bafalon (a type of xylophone), and various drums. Traditional dances often accompany the music made using these instruments, and these dances vary by region, culture, and ethnic group. Despite their differences and unique traits, all of the various music and dance traditions of Guinea-Bissau are brought together by their sense of community, and shared celebration of life and culture.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you think that life in Guinea-Bissau differs from, or is similar to, your own life here in Canada? What about in Quebec, specifically?
2. What do you think are the merits of learning about other countries and cultures of the world?
3. What is the role of music in culture at large? What is the role of music in *Pirate and the Lone Voice*?

Activities

Post-Show Activity – “Talk Show Host”

Big Idea: *Pirate and the Lone Voice* is largely about radio, as it plays a large role in the characters’ relationship to each other, and to their values. Over the course of this activity, students will be able to exercise creativity and examine their own values, whether it be types of dinosaurs or ongoing social justice issues.

Materials:

- ❖ Paper
- ❖ Markers/pencil crayons/crayons
- ❖ Any other appropriate craft materials
- ❖ (Optional: Device with access to recording software)

Activity: Provide each student with a few sheets of paper and some craft materials. Students will be *conceptualizing their own radio station*; picking a name, designing a logo, and coming up with one or more concepts for episodes or overall themes.

Encourage them to be as creative as possible, making their station uniquely theirs. Afterwards, allow students to present their creations to the class. Invite them to share their inspirations, reasons behind creative decisions, etc.

If classroom technology allows, expand the activity by allowing students to engage with audio recording/editing software (e.g. *Audacity*) to record a sample episode of their radio show! Students can work in pairs, invite each other on as guests, etc.

Post-Show Activity – “Make Your Voice Heard”

Big Idea: A research-based activity that allows students to engage in social justice issues they find most prevalent and personal. Promotes proper research practices and engages with the advocacy and resistance theme of the show.

Materials:

- ❖ Computer with internet access
 - Word processing or design software (e.g. Microsoft Word, Canva)

Activity: Have students pick a social justice topic that resonates most with them. Examples include: the homeless crisis, racial or gender inequity, LGBTQ+ rights, etc. After conducting research, students will

put together a one-page informational sheet of the most prevalent information surrounding their chosen topic—what the issue is, historical context, possible solutions, ways to help, and so on.

For older students, teachers can emphasize proper research practices by encouraging students to put together a bibliography, citing all sources used for research. Students can also be urged to fact-check, use primary and secondary sources, and taught what the differences are.

Post-Show Activity – “Dance Break”

Big Idea: Music is a big part of *Pirate and the Lone Voice*, and often provides relief from the tense goings on of the situation. Music is also how we connect to one another and is a large part of many cultures and practices. Simply put: music is important. This activity allows students to let loose and enjoy some tunes.

Materials:

- ❖ A device to play music through

Activity: Ask students to share their favourite songs. Play each song and encourage students to enjoy themselves and dance freely!

Additional Resources

[Donate](#) – Doctors Without Borders

[Guinea Bissau Country Profile](#)

[Guinea Bissau: Gov’t orders shutdown of 79 radio stations](#)

[Guinea Bissau: attack by gunmen silences opposition radio station in Bissau](#)

[Ethics 101: The Five Core Values of Journalism](#) – Video

[Radio Workshop](#) - Youth changing lives and communities through radio and podcasts

[Gaza’s Youngest Storyteller – Who is Lama Abu Jamous?](#)

[Bisan Owda](#) – Reporter from the Gaza Strip

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