

Uhuru – Exploring Themes

Post-Show Activity for Grades 9-12

Goals

- Students will identify and analyze key themes from *Uhuru*.
- Students will connect themes to characters, plot, theatrical choices, and social context.
- Students will engage in [Artful Thinking](#) routines to practice critical thinking.
- Students will demonstrate their understanding through group discussion and artistic response.

NOTE: This activity has been aligned with TEKS and [Universal Design for Learning](#). TEKS can be found at the end of this document.

Materials Needed

- [Alley Re-Sourced](#) guide for *Uhuru*.
 - Exploring Themes Student Handout (included, numbered separately for printing).
 - Includes Show Story Web, Outline, and Theme Representation Planner.
 - Pencils or pens.
 - Optional: Colored pencils, markers, or other art supplies.
 - Optional: digital tools for audio-visual presentation options.
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Step 1

Introduce the Themes

- Define the concept: Briefly discuss how a theme is a larger idea a play explores rather than a one-word topic. Introduce five possible themes:
 - Belonging and Identity
 - Freedom and Self-Definition
 - Colonization, Ownership, and Cultural Power
 - Privilege, Labor, and Economic Inequality
 - Good Intentions, Impact, and the Need to Be Seen
- Distribute the organizers: Give students the included Story Web, Outline, and Planner. Encourage them to organize notes during discussion and group work.

- Brainstorm as a class: Ask students to name other themes they observed and connect each idea to a specific moment or theatrical choice.

Step 2

Assign and Discuss a Theme

- Form groups: Assign each group one theme from the play.
- Discuss the theme by considering:
 - Key moments that develop or complicate the theme.
 - Characters who understand the theme differently.
 - How the changing altitude, weather, and distance from the summit affect the characters.
 - How humor makes difficult ideas easier or harder to confront.
 - How the invisible porters shape the audience's understanding of labor and power.

Universal Design for Learning tip: Bridge students' everyday language with academic phrasing. For example, "Sprite wants to prove he belongs, but he keeps deciding who else does not" can become "The play explores how a search for belonging can reproduce exclusion."

Step 3

Create a Representation of the Theme

- **Clarify the goal:** Explain that each group will create a representation that communicates:
 - The group's interpretation of its theme.
 - At least two lines, characters, or moments from the play that support the interpretation.
 - A connection, contrast, or change that helps the audience understand the theme.
- **Select a format:** Have groups choose one of the formats described on the student handout:
 - A poster, collage, or mood board combining lines or moments from the play, visuals, colors, words, and symbols to show different perspectives and explain the theme.
 - A route map tracing how the theme develops or changes as the hikers climb.
 - A short presentation combining visual, written, spoken, or recorded elements.

- A paired tableau showing two characters' conflicting views of the same idea. Students may perform the tableau or represent it through a drawing or staged arrangement of available objects.
- **Plan before creating:** Direct groups to complete the planning section on the student handout. Students may write, sketch, list, or discuss their responses before recording their group's ideas.
- **Divide responsibilities:** Encourage students to contribute according to their interests and strengths. Possible contributions include finding evidence, developing ideas, writing, drawing, organizing materials, creating movement, narrating, or presenting. Students may share responsibilities, and no student should be required to perform or speak publicly.
- **Check progress:** Display a visible timer and give verbal time warnings. Midway through the work period, ask groups to use the checklist on the student handout to review their progress.
- **Keep expectations consistent:** Remind students that every format will be evaluated using the same criteria: a clear interpretation of the theme, relevant evidence from the play, thoughtful creative choices, and effective communication. Artistic skill and performance ability are not being evaluated.

Step 4

Share and Reflect

- Have each group present its work, explain its theme, and identify the evidence and complication it chose.
- During presentations or a gallery walk, use See-Think-Wonder:
 - **See:** What details do you notice?
 - **Think:** What interpretation do those details suggest? What makes you say that?
 - **Wonder:** What question about the theme or character remains?
- Conclude by asking:
 - Which theme changed most between the beginning and end of the play?
 - Which character's understanding changed, and which character resisted change?

TEKS

Theatre, High School Levels I-IV

- Analyze and interpret characters, relationships, themes, and dramatic literature; collaborate to express ideas through writing, visual art, discussion, and performance.

English Language Arts and Reading, English I-IV

- Analyze complex characters, cultural and historical contexts, themes, and moral dilemmas; support interpretations with evidence from the text and performance.

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Student Handout

Create a Representation of Your Theme

Options

Choose one way to communicate your group's ideas using the materials available:

- **Poster, Collage, or Mood Board:** Combine lines or moments from the play with images, colors, words, and symbols that communicate the theme and show different perspectives.
- **Route Map:** Track how the theme develops or changes as the hikers climb.
- **Presentation:** Combine visual, written, spoken, or recorded elements.
- **Paired Tableau:** Show two characters' conflicting views through a frozen scene, drawing, or arrangement of objects.

Criteria

Your representation must include:

- A clear statement about the theme.
- At least two lines, characters, or moments from the play.
- Images, words, sounds, movement, or symbols that develop your idea.
- A connection, contrast, or change that helps explain the theme.

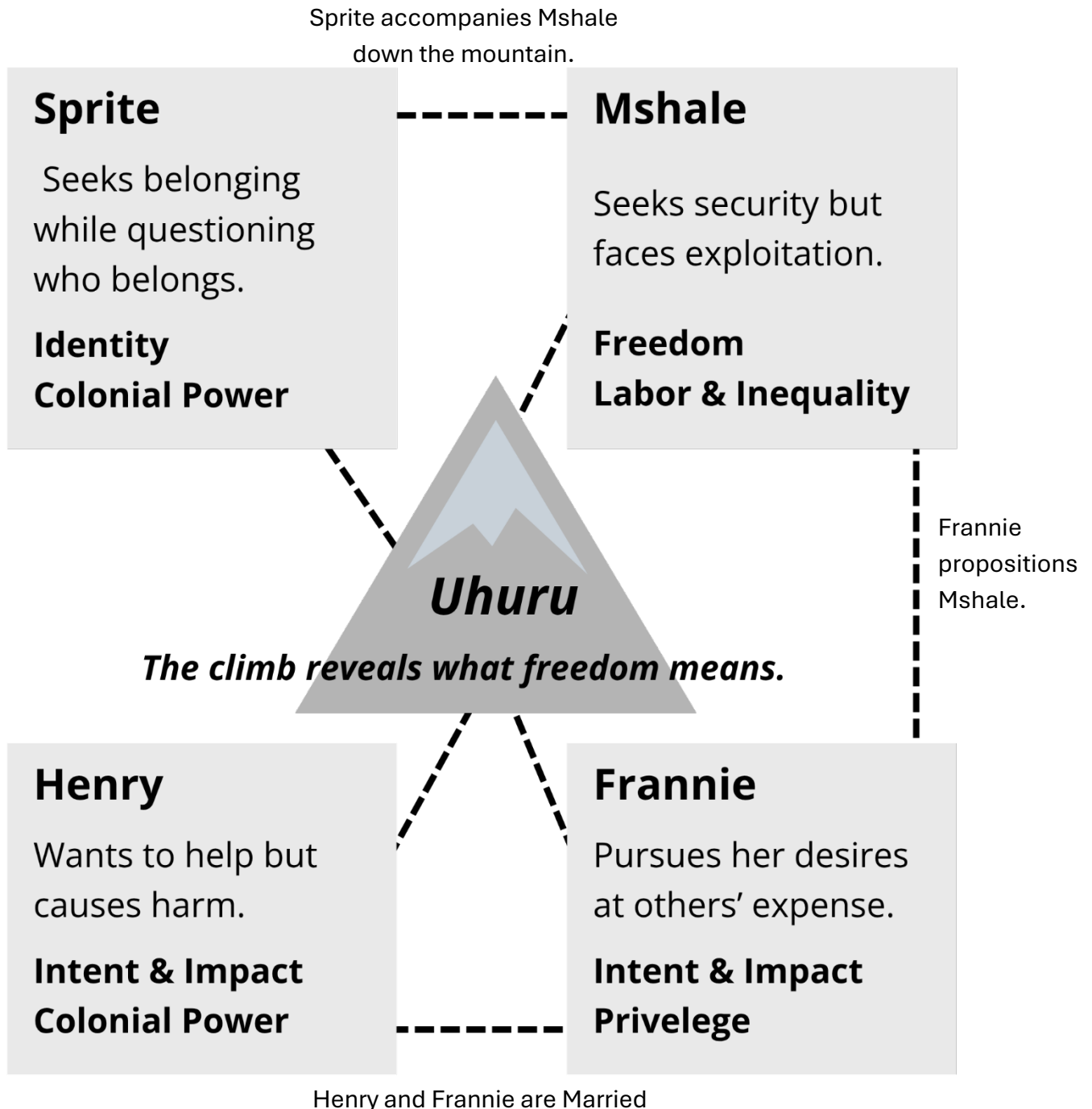
Plan Your Work

Use the space below and the questions provided to plan your work.

- What do we think the play communicates about our theme?
- Evidence from the play:
- How will we represent our idea?

Uhuru: Story Web and Outline

Story Web



Uhuru: Story Web and Outline

Outline

Use this outline as a guide to help you remember the play as you complete the activity.

Basic Play Information

- Title: Uhuru
- Playwright: Gloria Majule
- Genre: Contemporary comedy-drama
- Setting: The Machame Route of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania
- Central Points of View: Mshale and Sprite, alongside Henry and Frannie

Major Themes

- Identity and Belonging
- Freedom and Self-Definition
- Colonialism, Ownership, and Cultural Power
- Privilege, Labor, and Economic Inequality
- Good Intentions, Impact, and the Need to Be Seen

Key Moments and Ideas

- Sprite returns from America to climb Kilimanjaro as an act of decolonization, while Mshale, a former porter, sees the mountain as work and a route to a different life.
- Sprite challenges porter exploitation and who gets to define Tanzanian identity, clashing with Mshale's experiences and Henry and Frannie's missionary work.
- Hidden motives emerge: Sprite was taken to America by missionaries, Henry helped take Tanzanian children abroad for adoption, and Frannie has concealed her intentions toward Mshale.
- After Frannie shatters Mshale's imagined future, Sprite gives up the summit to accompany him down. Three days later, Mshale says he feels free at Mbezi Beach.

Overall Impact

- Through humor and conflict, the play examines how colonial attitudes shape tourism, religion, adoption, labor, identity, and belonging.
- Sprite's decision transforms "reaching Uhuru" from conquering a summit into choosing solidarity, connection, and self-defined freedom.