

SERVING *Elizabeth*

Stratford
FESTIVAL

2021 STUDY GUIDE

SERVING *Elizabeth*

BY MARCIA JOHNSON
DIRECTED BY KIMBERLEY RAMPERSAD

TOOLS FOR TEACHERS
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***SERVING ELIZABETH* STUDY GUIDE**

ABOUT THE PLAY

Serving Elizabeth

By Marcia Johnson

Directed by Kimberley Rampersad

Serving Elizabeth House Program

Grade and Curriculum Connections

- Grades 7+
- Global Competencies: Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Learning to Learn/ Self-Awareness
- The Arts
- English
- Language
- Canadian and World Studies
- Social Sciences and Humanities

Content Advisory

Deals with the impacts of living in a racist society and includes some coarse language

Synopsis

In Kenya in 1952, Mercy, a restaurant proprietor, is hired to cater the impending visit of Princess Elizabeth, soon to be Queen. In 2015, another story unfolds in London, England, where a young Kenyan-born Canadian, Tia, is working as an intern on a TV drama series about the British royal family – while also pursuing a writing project of her own. These parallel narratives seem only coincidentally connected – until a surprising twist reveals a deeper relationship between the two. Audiences are certain to enjoy this ingenious contemporary drama that keeps us guessing as it explores issues of colonialism, nationalism and the question of who gets to have a voice.

Themes and Motifs

- Resistance
 - Subversion
 - Rebellion
 - Reclamation
- History
 - Re-examining What We Think We Know
 - Shifting and Centring Perspectives
 - Subverting Inequitable Systems

- Writing
 - Bias, Race and Representation
 - Autonomy and Self-Determination

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Pre-Show

- What do you already know about the history of Kenya? The British Monarchy? The connections between the two?
- With inequitable systems such as monarchies, is it better to change them or do away with them completely? Explain your position.
- Why do you think people like fiction based on history or true stories? What's the relationship between history and truth?
- Who decides what goes down in history?
- What is bias? How can we find and change our biases?

Post-Show

- What surprised you most about the play?
- In what ways do the characters in the play demonstrate resistance to injustice?
- Tia's reimagining of the Kenyan story not represented in Maurice's script is fiction, but in what ways does her story provide important truths?
- Why do you think the actors in this production each played two different characters? What impact did it have on your experience?
- What does the title of the play mean to you? What do you think the playwright intended with it?
- In your opinion, which character changed most over the course of the play? Why do you think this is the case?

MINDS ON

Objective: This exercise invites students to respond to representations of history in the same way as the playwright did in writing *Serving Elizabeth*.

Materials: Computer, television and film access

Directions:

- The playwright, Marcia Johnson, was inspired to write this play by the anger she felt when she saw the lack of representation and erasure of Kenyan voices in the second episode of the first season of the television series *The Crown*.
- Invite students to choose a historical film or television series to watch.
- Ask students to watch a scene or excerpt and to notice which characters are foregrounded and which characters are left out or remain silent. Invite them to reimagine and rewrite the scene in a way that highlights those characters.
- Have students share what they noticed, along with their rewrites, in small groups.
- Invite students to reflect on the debriefing questions independently, in conversation with a partner or in small groups, or in a written reflection.

Debriefing Questions:

- What issues of representation were common across your chosen historical scenes?
- In rewriting the scenes, what changes did you discover about the story that was being told?
- What does representation mean to you? What differences in terms of representation do you hope to see in future theatre, film and television?

CONNECTION TO THE ARCHIVES

Queen Elizabeth I and other monarchs have appeared in many of our plays before. This crown is from the 1993 production of *King John*. In reality, crowns like this would be quite heavy and cumbersome to wear. What materials and approaches might Stratford Festival costume designers and prop builders employ so that the actors wearing them on stage can comfortably perform?



The Stratford Festival's Archives maintains, conserves and protects recent and historical records about the Festival and makes those materials available to people around the world. Our multi-media archival holdings date from 1952 and extend through to contemporary materials. We house correspondence, production records, Board minutes, photography, design artwork, scores, audio-visual records, costumes, props and set decoration, press releases and other promotional materials: these document the processes that bring a production to the stage and reflect all aspects of mounting a play, from the administrative to the creative and beyond.

In addition to visiting the Archives in person, you can explore our [online catalogue](#).

RESOURCES

[*Serving Elizabeth Showstarters*](#)

Contact us to book a streamed viewing of this production for your class: groups@stratfordfestival.ca