



## TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE

### ***CHOIR BOY***

A co-production with Canadian Stage  
By Tarell Alvin McCraney



*Image description 1: "CHOIR BOY" in white bold text. Behind the text is a large stained-glass wall in a church. Three actors, wearing matching prep-school blazers, are standing in a line. They are singing.*

2023.2024 season

Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage

January 25–February 25, 2024

This show is generously sponsored by:



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## Welcome

This guide was created for teachers and students. It contains an overview of the play's story as well as informative resources and activities for teachers and students. The guide aims to provide background knowledge and critical perspectives on the play that will yield fruitful discussion and foster an understanding and appreciation of theatre arts.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for the guide, please contact our Education Coordinator, Mikenzie Page, [mpage@artsclub.com](mailto:mpage@artsclub.com).

This study guide was written by Mikenzie Page.

## About The Arts Club Theatre Company

The Arts Club of Vancouver was founded in 1958 as a private club for artists, musicians, and actors. It became the Arts Club Theatre in 1964 when the company opened its first stage in a converted gospel hall at Seymour and Davie Streets. Now in its 60th season of producing professional live theatre in Vancouver, the Arts Club Theatre Company is a non-profit charitable organization that operates three theatres: the Granville Island Stage, the Stanley Industrial

Alliance Stage, and the Newmont Stage at the BMO Theatre Centre. Its popular productions range from musicals and contemporary comedies to new works and classics.

Learn more about the Arts Club Theatre Company at [artsclub.com](http://artsclub.com).

## Learning Objectives

Through the narrative, the play aims to

- Examine and engage with choral music as a unique way to explore themes of identity and belonging.
- Engage in conversations about race, respectability politics, and masculinity, by watching the challenges young Black men face as they come of age.
- Understand and identify the complexities of upholding tradition and traditional values.

### Genre Drama/Musical

**Show Dates January 25–February 25, 2024**

**Age Range: Recommended for grades 9-12**

**Venue: Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage**

**Content Advisory: This production contains mature content such as coarse language, homophobic slurs, racial slurs, depictions of identity-based violence, graphic descriptions of sexuality, and partial nudity. This production also includes water-based fog and haze. Please contact our box office for more information.**

## Synopsis

The show opens with Headmaster Marrow opening remarks for Charles R. Drew Prep School's 49<sup>th</sup> commencement ceremony. He welcomes the audience and announces Pharus Jonathon Young as next year's Choir Lead, before Pharus begins to sing the school song. During the song, Pharus pauses and turns his back to the audience. Before he turns back to continue his song, the scene shifts to Headmaster Marrow's office.

Headmaster Marrow admonishes Pharus for "ruining" the prestigious graduation ceremony and tradition of a song being sung until all graduating students are gathered and seated on the stage. Headmaster Marrow explains he has had to defend Pharus to the school's board and they are debating whether to take Pharus' scholarship away, without which he can't afford to attend the prestigious Charles R. Drew Prep School. He questions why Pharus turned his back to which

Pharus dodges the question. Eventually Pharus explains he does not lie and he “does not snitch”. Headmaster Marrow figures out that while Pharus was singing, a fellow choir member was distracting him and calling him offensive slurs. He asks to know who so he can speak to him, but Pharus refuses to tell him, quoting “A Drew man never tells on his brother.” Pharus wishes the headmaster a good summer and leaves.

The season shifts to the following semester on the first day of classes in the choir hall. Bobby Marrow, Headmaster Marrow’s nephew, and Junior, another choir member, catch up after the summer. It’s revealed that Bobby was the choir member who distracted Pharus in the spring and has been placed on trash duty by his uncle as punishment. Bobby explains that he believes Pharus snitched on him and he will get him back. Junior defends Pharus to which Bobby mocks him, saying Junior must have a crush on Pharus to defend him. Pharus, David, and Aj enter and Pharus addresses the choir as their new leader. The audience learns that the choir is currently entering its 50<sup>th</sup> year and currently has no faculty sponsor. Pharus begins the rehearsal and Bobby is resistant and refuses to listen. Pharus calls Bobby out for chewing gum, to which he responds that Pharus snitched on him. Pharus retorts that Bobby and Junior distracted him and cursed him out at their last performance. Bobby attempts to deny this while Junior tries to placate the situation. Bobby accuses Pharus of breaking the sacred rule, “A Drew man never tells on his brother.” Pharus denies this and explains all the reasons he could tell on Bobby but didn’t. Pharus kicks Bobby out of the choir but allows Junior to stay. He asks David to lead the group in prayer before they sing.

The scene changes to Headmaster Marrow giving a end of week announcement before shifting to AJ and Pharus’ room. AJ warns Pharus that by kicking Bobby out of the choir, it makes it look like Pharus is trying to be the only tenor in the choir. Pharus dismisses this and the idea that he should care about what others think of him. AJ reveals that in sophomore year, no one wanted to room with Pharus due to his effeminate nature. Pharus tells AJ he can switch rooms at any time before defending his choice to kick Bobby out of the choir. AJ points out that David, another member of the choir, also said horrible things to Pharus last year but hasn’t received the same treatment. Pharus shoots back that David has apologized and since changed, even wanting to go to seminary school. The two talk more, revealing Pharus wants another chance at singing the commencement song to prove himself against all those who thought he would fail. Pharus states he will miss Drew but won’t be that sad to finally graduate.

The scene shifts to a new day at the school. Headmaster Marrow announces that a new teacher will be joining the faculty, and they are incredibly privileged to have him as he is coming out of semi-retirement. The boys complain that they already have enough classes and work already. Mr. Pendleton enters, now the only white teacher in the school, and introduces himself. He explains he is here to teach a creative thinking course which once again, none of the students want to take. Headmaster Marrow explains it is mandatory and Mr. Pendleton offers them their

first homework assignment. Find a well-known theory and challenge it. The scene ends as the bell rings.

The boys all call home later in the evening. The audience gets a glimpse into the home lives of all the boys, and it is revealed David's family is struggling financially.

Later, on the quad of the school, Headmaster Marrow confronts Pharus about kicking Bobby out of the choir. Headmaster Marrow tells Pharus he is no longer lead of the choir due to not getting along with the other choir members. Pharus immediately asks for an appeal while suggesting he is being punished for Bobby calling him racial and homophobic slurs. Headmaster Marrow asks "if he is threatening him?" while Pharus defends his actions, as he has been leading the choir alone with success. Headmaster Marrow admits defeat and allows Pharus to stay as lead.

The scene changes to Mr. Pendleton's class, where Mr. Pendleton is critiquing David's assignment of the rise of capitalism and the Atlantic slave trade. Mr. Pendleton expresses that while the numbers are horrifying, David's assignment is lacking information about the process and calculation that went into these atrocities. The ugly part is in the pain, suffering, *and* calculating that went into eliminating other people's personhood, Mr. Pendleton explains. David retorts back that he "is black" in response to Mr. Pendleton asking him to not take it "as personally", highlighting the difference in David's experience as a young Black man and Mr. Pendleton's experience as an older white man. Pharus helps prompt David in answering Mr. Pendleton's questions, to which Mr. Pendleton praises them both and their study partnership.

As Mr. Pendleton struggles to engage the rest of the class, Pharus suggest a new topic and begins a long-winded speech regarding spirituals, religious songs associated with Black Christians of the southern US which are thought to have come from European hymns and African musical elements by Black slaves. Pharus questions if spirituals really ever contained coded messages to freedom and states what matters are the beautiful music and lyrics of spirituals, forged from oppression and brutality, which are the true proof of resilience.

Bobby, finally sick of Pharus' speeches, questions "who made him the Negro historian?". They begin to argue, regarding the history of spirituals. Pharus ends the argument by saying that the impact of spirituals shouldn't be diminished because it didn't contain secret maps to freedom. Bobby storms out. Mr. Pendleton goes to follow him but is stopped by AJ and David who say Bobby "just needs time to cool off."

The scene changes as Bobby runs into Junior on the quad. They are quickly caught by Headmaster Marrow, who informs Bobby that as of tomorrow, he is back in the choir. Bobby begins to question Headmaster Marrow before he is quickly shut down. Headmaster Marrow leaves as David enters. David sympathizes with Bobby's anger, explaining that's how he used to be before he found God and decided to become a pastor. Bobby retorts that to be a pastor, you first need to graduate high school, a jab at David's failing grades. Bobby then warns David of his

association with Pharus. When David defends himself as someone who walks “with the Lord”, Bobby reminds him “that He didn’t keep the best company either and look what they did to him.”. Bobby and Junior exit and the scene changes to the showers.

The boys all shower as Headmaster Marrow makes school-wide announcements. They sing “I Feel Like a Motherless Child”. Everyone exits as the song concludes except Pharus and AJ, the latter who remarks that Pharus “always has to be the best” regarding how loud he sings in the showers. Pharus begins to tease AJ back regarding his relationship status. AJ notices while Pharus teases him, he only uses they/ them pronouns when referring to AJ’s future partner. AJ clarifies that he is straight before asking Pharus who he is “saving” it for. Pharus jokingly responds with Jesus. AJ gently tries to pry more info from Pharus and offer him support when David enters the showers. He explains that while he didn’t mean to overhear them, he thinks Pharus should not speak so inappropriately especially in the showers. Pharus apologizes and AJ exits.

The scene opens on Mr. Pendleton and Headmaster Marrow. Headmaster Marrow requests that Mr. Pendleton become the new faculty sponsor for the choir. Mr. Pendleton begins to explain that he can’t sing and doesn’t know anything about choir when Headmaster Marrow interrupts. He explains that he needs Mr. Pendleton there as a peace maker, especially with Bobby returning to the choir. Mr. Pendleton points out that Bobby and Pharus hate each other and questions whether Bobby returning to the choir is the right choice. Headmaster Marrow explains the pressure he is under from the school board and that it looks bad if he can’t keep “his own” in line. He asks Mr. Pendleton to keep a eye on them and Mr. Pendleton agrees.

The scene begins in Pharus and AJ’s shared dorm room. Pharus rants at AJ regarding his cleanliness and respect of their shared space. AJ only laughs and teases Pharus back in response. Pharus picks up one of AJ’s socks to get rid and AJ jokingly tackles him and begins to tickle/play fight with Pharus. This causes Pharus to get an erection and he screams and pushes AJ off him. AJ is worried he hurt Pharus but soon realizes what happened. AJ reassures Pharus that it’s fine even though he doesn’t really know how to react. AJ realizes that Pharus is gay as he attempts to make him feel better. In response, Pharus offers to switch rooms as he thinks AJ won’t want to room with “someone like him.”. Pharus promises it wouldn’t hurt his feelings but makes AJ swear not to tell anyone. AJ asks Pharus if he really wants him to move out because he never said he wanted to leave after Pharus’ revelation. The scene ends with AJ asking Pharus what happened to his previous roommate.

The boys and Mr. Pendleton enter and sit in the choir hall in a long, uncomfortable silence. When Mr. Pendleton attempts to break the ice, the boys begin to argue leading Mr. Pendleton to announce that he is cancelling their Gala performance. The boys begin to protest but Mr. Pendleton explains they need to learn how to act like brothers or at least a choir before he considers allowing them to perform. He gives the entire choir an assignment: for next class, bring in and perform a song from their parents’ generation. If they all can accomplish this, Mr. Pendleton will allow them to perform at the Gala.

The scene changes to Pharus on the phone with his mother. He tells her about choir and when he asks if she will be attending his graduation ceremony, she says she “doesn’t need to be there to know he graduated.”. Pharus reluctantly accepts this and says he hopes she is proud of him and if she isn’t, she will be.

The scene shifts to the next choir class. Bobby and Junior perform an upbeat song from the eighties. Mr. Pendleton congratulates them on their performance when Pharus raises his hand. He asks Bobby how old his mother is and explains that if that song was from the eighties, “she must have had him at 16 or 17.”. Pharus makes a remark about her “fastness” which enrages Bobby, as his mother is dead. He begins to swear at Pharus and gets in his face, using racial and homophobic slurs directed at Pharus. When Bobby takes it too far, Mr. Pendleton grabs him and lifts him off the ground, repeating not to say those words. The class falls silent as AJ and Pharus ask Mr. Pendleton to calm down. Mr. Pendleton angrily states that they are “calling each other by words they know nothing about.”. Bobby questions him and Mr. Pendleton dismisses the choir, saying “he’s lost enough friends behind that word.”.

Later, Pharus enters the showers. There is water running and someone else is there, unseen to the audience. Pharus begins to speak to this person and apologizes for his behaviour earlier in the day. There is familiarity as Pharus explains to this unknown person he’s been hoping to stand near him all day. It becomes clear that Pharus has been in some sort of secret relationship as he moves closer to the shower, however the door opens unexpectedly, and Junior enters. Pharus is punched by this unknown person and falls to the ground.

The play shifts to David on the quad, looking for Mr. Pendleton. David explains he wanted to finish his assignment for choir when Mr. Pendleton notices he is wet. Mr. Pendleton asks David if he is alright to which David says no. He sings a love ballad, and the scene ends.

The scene opens with Headmaster Marrow and an injured Pharus in an office. Headmaster Marrow asks Pharus to tell him what happened and who started a fight with him. Pharus responds that it isn’t a fight if he fell back and just took it. Pharus claims he fell and refuses to answer any of Headmaster Marrow’s questions.

As Pharus continues to deny a fight took place, Headmaster Marrow begins to question the other boys. He starts with AJ, who explains that his family didn’t want him rooming with Pharus. On the day AJ moved in, his brother called Pharus a homophobic slur which Pharus overheard. Regardless of what he heard, Pharus continued to be kind to AJ and his entire family. AJ tells Headmaster Marrow that he didn’t hit Pharus and leaves.

Headmaster Marrow questions Bobby and Junior next. Bobby is extremely resistant and explains that Junior is here as his witness to prove he didn’t beat up Pharus. Headmaster Marrow exclaims that he doesn’t care why Junior is here, but he knows what Bobby said to Mr. Pendleton. Headmaster Marrow explains that Mr. Pendleton marched with Dr. Martin Luther

King Jr and has protested and participated in more sit ins than years Bobby has been alive. He expresses his disappointment that his nephew has driven Mr. Pendleton to want to retire and give up on today's youth. The boys interrupt and Junior tells Headmaster Marrow that Bobby wasn't on campus when Pharus was assaulted. Bobby snuck out and was at the public school visiting his girlfriend while Junior kept watch for them.

The scene changes to the David, who speaks cryptically to Headmaster Marrow and quotes Psalms 139, "Fearfully and marvellously are we made". David begins to unravel, explaining he how he prayed for "it", his feelings towards Pharus, to go away. He explains how Pharus is the only one who understands him and he freaked out when he heard someone enter the showers. The scene ends with Headmaster Marrow in disbelief.

The scene shifts to the office, where Pharus sits outside while Mr. Pendleton and Headmaster Marrow talk. Headmaster Marrow asks Mr. Pendleton if it has always been this difficult. They discuss the school's history and the racism the school has faced. Mr. Pendleton asks if Headmaster Marrow was really surprised that at some point in the fifty-year history of Charles R. Drew Prep School, that there have been (and will continue to be) gay students. Headmaster Marrow pauses before explaining that David has been suspended for fighting and with that suspension, David has lost his scholarship. The pair debate as educators what their role in this situation is when Mr. Pendleton remarks that Headmaster Marrow was "prepared for someone to hurt Pharus, but not for someone to love him.". Mr. Pendleton asks Headmaster Marrow if he has told Pharus that he won't be performing. The scene shifts to a musical performance, highlighting Headmaster Marrow before shifting.

The scene opens in Pharus and AJ's dorm room, where Pharus is desperately attempting to practice late at night in case Headmaster Marrow changes his mind and lets him perform. AJ wakes up and the pair talk about tomorrow's graduation ceremony. Pharus' mother has travelled to attend but when Pharus greeted her, all she commented on was that he "needed a haircut". AJ offers to cut Pharus's hair before graduation and Pharus agrees. AJ begins to trim his hair and Pharus talks about his childhood experiences in barbershops and his old neighborhood where he grew up. Pharus speaks about how he never belonged there and didn't feel like he had space to be himself until this school. After this moment, the pair agree to try and get some sleep.

The final scene opens, almost an exact mirror of the first scene of the entire play except this time, Bobby is singing lead for the choir. Headmaster Marrow offers the opening commencement speech and announces Bobby as the new Choir Lead. The choir sings but during the song, Bobby stops singing and looks behind him just as Pharus did a year ago. Bobby turns back and continues.

END OF PLAY



## Characters

**Headmaster Marrow.** The youngest and current headmaster of Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys. Headmaster Marrow is Bobby Marrow's paternal uncle.

**Pharus Jonathon Young:** A junior and Choir Lead at Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys. He is roommates with AJ.

**Mr. Pendleton:** A older professor at Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys.

**Bobby Marrow:** A junior at Charles R. Drew Prep School for boys and a member of the school's choir. He is Headmaster Marrow's nephew.

**Junior Davis:** A junior at Charles R. Drew Prep School for boys. He is a member of the school's choir.

**Anthony Justin "AJ" James:** A senior at Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys. He is a member of the school's choir and baseball team. He is roommates with Pharus

**David Heard:** A senior at Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys and a member of the school's choir.

## About the Playwright:

### Tarell Alvin McCraney

Tarell Alvin McCraney is an award-winning American playwright, screenwriter, and actor based in Los Angeles. He is best known for his acclaimed theatre trilogy, *The Brothers/Sister Plays*. His script, *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*, is the basis of the Oscar-winning film, *Moonlight*, directed by Barry Jenkins. Both McCraney and Jenkins won the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay for *Moonlight* in 2017. His work often focuses on racial identity, queerness, how these identities intersect, and the innate drive to be yourself are in the face of conformity.

Tarell is the chair of playwriting at the Yale School of Drama and a member of the Steppenwolf Theatre Ensemble. As of 2023, Tarell has been named the artistic director of the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles, California. His renowned works include the plays *Choir Boy*, *Head of Passes*, *Ms. Blakk for President*, *The Breach*, *Wig Out!*, and the critically acclaimed trilogy *The Brother/Sister Plays: In the Red and Brown Water*, *The Brothers Size*, and *Marcus; Or the Secret of Sweet*.

## BC Curriculum Connections:

### Drama 10/11/12

#### *Big Ideas*

- Drama communicates ideas, emotions, perspectives through movement, sound, imagery, and language.
- Active participation in theatre creates personal and cultural connections which offer insight into the human experience.

#### *Curriculum Connections*

- Explore and create dramatic works to express ideas and emotions.
- Reflect on dramatic works and make connections with personal experiences.
- Communicate ideas through a theatre production;

### Social Studies 10/11/12

#### *Big Ideas*

- Religion can powerfully shape social, political, legal, and environmental values (from Comparative World Religions 12)

- Examining questions in philosophy allows people to question their assumptions and better understand their beliefs. (from Philosophy 12)
- An individual's search for existential insight and transcendence can be shaped by a variety of religious, spiritual, or philosophy.

#### *Curriculum Connections*

- Assess the accuracy of representations of religion in media and popular culture (critical media literacy).
- Assess the relevance of philosophical ideas for everyday life and current social and political issues.
- Assess how underlying conditions and the actions of individuals or groups influence events, decisions, or developments, and analyze multiple consequences (cause and consequence).

#### **Choral Music 10/11/12**

##### *Big Ideas*

- Music offers unique ways of exploring our identity and sense of belonging.
- Choral music offers aesthetic experiences that can transform our perspective.
- Purposeful choices enhance the quality, artistry, and authenticity of musical processes.

#### *Curriculum Connections*

- Explore music that demonstrates personal voice, story, and values.
- Demonstrate and refine a diverse repertoire of choral music that includes multiple perspectives, themes, and contexts.
- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts.

#### **Discussion Questions Pre-Show:**

1. What do you know about boarding schools? What are some stereotypes about boarding schools?
2. Have you heard of historically Black boarding schools? What do you know about the history of these institutions?
3. The title of the play is *Choir Boy*. Why do you think the playwright chose this name?
4. What do you know about choral music? Do you have any preconceived ideas of what choir music is?

## Discussion Questions Post-Show:

1. "I see, I see, you were preparing for someone to hurt Pharus? ... Never thought someone could love him".

-*Choir Boy*, pg. 54

*Choir Boy* was originally written in 2014. How has the world changed? How has it stayed the same?

2. Tradition is a major theme throughout the narrative of *Choir Boy*. Can tradition be good? When is it necessary or needed? How can tradition be harmful?
3. How does the music enhance the story?
4. What do you think of the choice to have the choir be acapella? Why do you think this choice was made?

## ACTIVITY 1: Movement through Music

Throughout *Choir Boy*, gospel music is woven through the narrative to enhance the story and let the audience in on the characters inner thoughts and feelings. In film, theatre, and TV, sound design is used to shape and build the world of the play while influencing the audiences view of the events unfolding. In this activity, students will engage with the text of *Choir Boy* while exploring how different music/soundscapes will influence a scene.

**Materials:** Paper, pens, a speaker.

### Part 1: Brainstorm

1. Read over the following scenes from *Choir Boy*. As you read the scenes, consider what music would fit the scene. Is there music that would be completely out of place in this scene? Are there certain genres that would be more effective?
2. Get into groups of 3-4 and pick a scene. From here, discuss what music choices would suit this scene. Also discuss what music would **not** fit the scene.

### Part 2: Act it out!

1. Assign roles/lines to members of your group. Folks are also welcome to participate as sound techs, lighting techs, etc. if that is more engaging for them.
2. Rehearse your scene TWO different ways.
  - Try your scene with music that enhances the scene and your group's vision.

- Then, try your scene with music that doesn't fit at all! (e.g. circus music, heavy metal, screamo, bird calls, etc.)
3. Feel free to invite students to perform both scenes for the class. After, gather everyone to share and reflect.

### **Part 3: Reflection & Discussion**

- a. How did it feel to showcase your scenes as a group?
- b. Which version of your scene was a more effective way to tell the story? Which version was more fun to create?
- c. How does music subconsciously influence our perception of the stories and media we consume? How does it affect the genre of a play or film?

\*Theses excerpts are to be used for educational purposes only and cannot be distributed.

#### **SCENE 1**

**HEADMASTER.** I want to speak to you.

**PHARUS.** Headmaster Marrow ...

**HEADMASTER.** You throw Bobby out?

**PHARUS.** The Choir? He just told you that? That was months ago.

**HEADMASTER.** Why?

**PHARUS.** Now you know I'm not supposed to tattle on a fellow student like that. But it was well within My rights as lead of the Drew Prep Boys Choir. If you would like sir I could go get the other members ...

**HEADMASTER.** You think this is funny?

**PHARUS.** Like ... Like Laugh out Loud?

**HEADMASTER.** You're smiling.

**PHARUS.** I am smiling but inside I am really hurt I ... I miss Bobby who else will interrupt me every Time I give a correction to the choir.

**HEADMASTER.** I thought I asked you to tighten up.  
No trouble!!!

**PHARUS.** What trouble, sir, every year a student either  
leaves or Can't perform ...

**HEADMASTER.** You are no longer lead of the  
choir.

**PHARUS.** Wh ... what why?

**HEADMASTER.** You cannot lead. You can't get along with  
Choir members then ...

END OF SCENE

## **SCENE 2**

**AJ.** Why are you being so mean?

**PHARUS.** All I ask Anthony is you leave your funky  
socks On your side of the room. That's all I say,  
that's it. I don't care if you leave papers and even  
your dusty Draws on the floor but your socks smell  
like your shoes. Your shoes smell like your feet and  
yah feet smell. Like baby puke 'n' corn chips!

You laughing but then you got the nerve, My  
God, To leave lil sticky packages when you think  
I ain't Noticing, on these dangerously dirty  
socks, on my Side of the room. I don't want your  
kith and kin cloth On my things boy! I know you  
hear me.

**AJ.** Pharus Bwoi Calm down!

**PHARUS.** I AM! BEING! CALM!

**AJ.** What's wrong sweetheart?

**PHARUS.** Don't you call me ...

**AJ.** You acting like my wife or something.

**PHARUS.** Uh, uh 'cause wives get some joy out of this lunacy. I am just your roommate, barely your friend.

**AJ.** You my friend.

**PHARUS.** You wanna see a friendship end lil drummer boi? Keep leaving these gifts 'round ... in ... In fact you know what .. .

**AJ.** Pharus what you ... don't ... eh boi ... you give me my sock.

**PHARUS.** Oh now you want your sock.

END OF SCENE

### SCENE 3

**HEADMASTER.** What happened? Son? I know you might be ashamed. I know that. None Of the boys ... no boy on this campus has a nick on 'em. 'Cept you, son. Tell me about The fight.

**PHARUS.** Wasn't a fight.

**HEADMASTER.** So, what, you fell?

**PHARUS.** Fight mean you put hands up and fight Back. I just ... just took it.

**HEADMASTER.** Why ... why would you do that?

**PHARUS.** What you fight for, sir? What you fight For? You fight when you believe what you doing, what you are, is right. Huh. Everybody 'round you always telling you, showing You that you ain't nothing, that they don't want you to be nothing, what you fight For then? What you defending? You believe like, like they believe so Who you fighting for?

**HEADMASTER.** Don't ... don't cry, Pharus.

**PHARUS.** I fell. I fell in the showers.

**HEADMASTER.** Don't lie ...

**PHARUS.** I did!

**HEADMASTER.** The custodian found you laying on that side. The bruise on your eye and lip on this sidePharus just say who ...

**PHARUS.** No! No.Ain't nobody done nothing.

**HEADMASTER.** Stop lying.

**PHARUS.** You stop calling me a liar and I will Stop being one. I'm a Drew man. You wanna holla out something 'Bout me, can't you say that, Headmaster? You see I'm low need something to lift my head into, try that. Pharus is a Drew man ...

**HEADMASTER.** Son.

**PHARUS.** He lives the Drew way.

**HEADMASTER.** Stop.

**PHARUS.** He follows the Drew rules.

**HEADMASTER.** That rule was made up amongst students. This, this is a real matter.

**PHARUS.** Would you rather be feared or respected Headmaster Marrow?

**HEADMASTER.** Pharus ...

**PHARUS.** Which!

**HEADMASTER.** I ... I ... respected.

**PHARUS.** I can't ever make them fear me. (*Shift.*)

END OF SCENE



## ACTIVITY 2: With Great Power...

Throughout *Choir Boy's* narrative, we see every character struggle with power. Power over others, power over themselves, and what it means to be powerless are all challenges endured over the course of the play. In this activity, students will explore power and status as a behaviour and explore the subtle differences when power dynamics shift.

**Materials:** A deck of cards and Scotch tape.

### Part 1: Exploring Status

1. Shuffle the deck of cards so the cards are randomized. Each student will receive one card but instruct them to keep their card a secret. Let them know that the King is the highest status card and decreases in power and status from there.
2. Have students begin to walk around the room as themselves. Once they have settled into walking, instruct them to begin to physicalize the status of their cards. How do the higher status cards command the space? How do the lower status cards react?
3. Allow the students time to explore and interact with each other as these characters before moving on.

### Part 2: Shifting Status

1. Students can pair off in groups of 2. Reshuffle all the cards and hand them out again. Have the students NOT look at their own card and using tape, stick the card to their forehead (like the game Heads Up). Students should be able to see their partner's card/status but not their own.
2. Students can decide on a scenario and relationship together (e.g. they are siblings/friends/coworkers in an aquarium, park, amusement park, etc.).
3. They will then improvise a scene, treating their partner as higher/lower status depending on the card on their partner's forehead.
4. At some point during the exercise, instruct the pairs that by the end of the scene there must be a shift in status.
5. Once everyone has completed their scenes, gather the group for reflection and discussion.

### **Part 3: Reflection and Discussion**

- a) How did status affect how your character interacted with others?
- b) Did you find higher or lower status more challenging?
- c) How do you think status changes when you add in more unknown variables and nuances to the relationship? (e.g. power dynamics, hierarchy, privilege, etc.)
- d) If you had to list the characters from Choir Boy, from most powerful to least powerful, what order would they be in?

## **RESOURCES**

### **Ethós Lab**

Ethós Lab is an afterschool innovation academy for youth Grades 5 to 12 to come to discover, explore, and grow through S.T.E.A.M and culture-based experience.

<https://ethoslab.ca/about-us/>

### **Healing in Color**

Healing in Colour is a Vancouver-based organization that offers a directory of BIPOC therapists and allied professionals, and resources like community organizations, podcasts, and articles.

[healingincolour.com](http://healingincolour.com)

### **Vancouver Black Therapy & Advocacy Foundation**

The Vancouver Black Therapy & Advocacy Foundation connects participants with advocates and covers service fees so participants can access mental health care from Black service providers. Check out the Resources section for mental health resources, mutual aid, and service providers.

[vancouverblacktherapyfoundation.com](http://vancouverblacktherapyfoundation.com)

### **Qmunity**

QMUNITY is a non-profit organization based in Vancouver, BC that works to improve queer, trans, and Two-Spirit lives. We provide a safer space for 2SLGBTQIA+ people and their allies to fully self-express while feeling welcome and included. Our building serves as a catalyst for community initiatives and collective strength.

<https://qmunity.ca/programs-services/>

## **SOURCES**

<https://artsclub.com/shows/2023-2024/choir-boy>

BC curriculum:

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum>

About the Playwright

<https://www.canadianstage.com/cs-grid-blog/read/spotlight-on-tarell-alvin-mccraney-playwright-of-choir-boy>

<https://www.geffenplayhouse.org/blog/tarell-alvin-mccraney-named-artistic-director/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarell\\_Alvin\\_McCraney](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarell_Alvin_McCraney)

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2023-09-12/tarell-alvin-mccraney-playwright-moonlight-screenwriter-new-artistic-director-geffen-playhouse>

Discussion Questions

<https://www.alliancetheatre.org/sites/default/files/FY14%20Choir%20Boy%20Study%20Guide.pdf>

[https://issuu.com/geffenplayhouse/docs/choir\\_boy\\_-\\_study\\_guide](https://issuu.com/geffenplayhouse/docs/choir_boy_-_study_guide)

<https://www.gablestage.org/wp-content/uploads/CHOIR-BOY-Study-Guide1.pdf>

Resources:

<https://ethoslab.ca/about-us/>

[healingincolour.com](https://healingincolour.com)

[vancouverblacktherapyfoundation.com](https://vancouverblacktherapyfoundation.com)

<https://qmunity.ca/programs-services/>