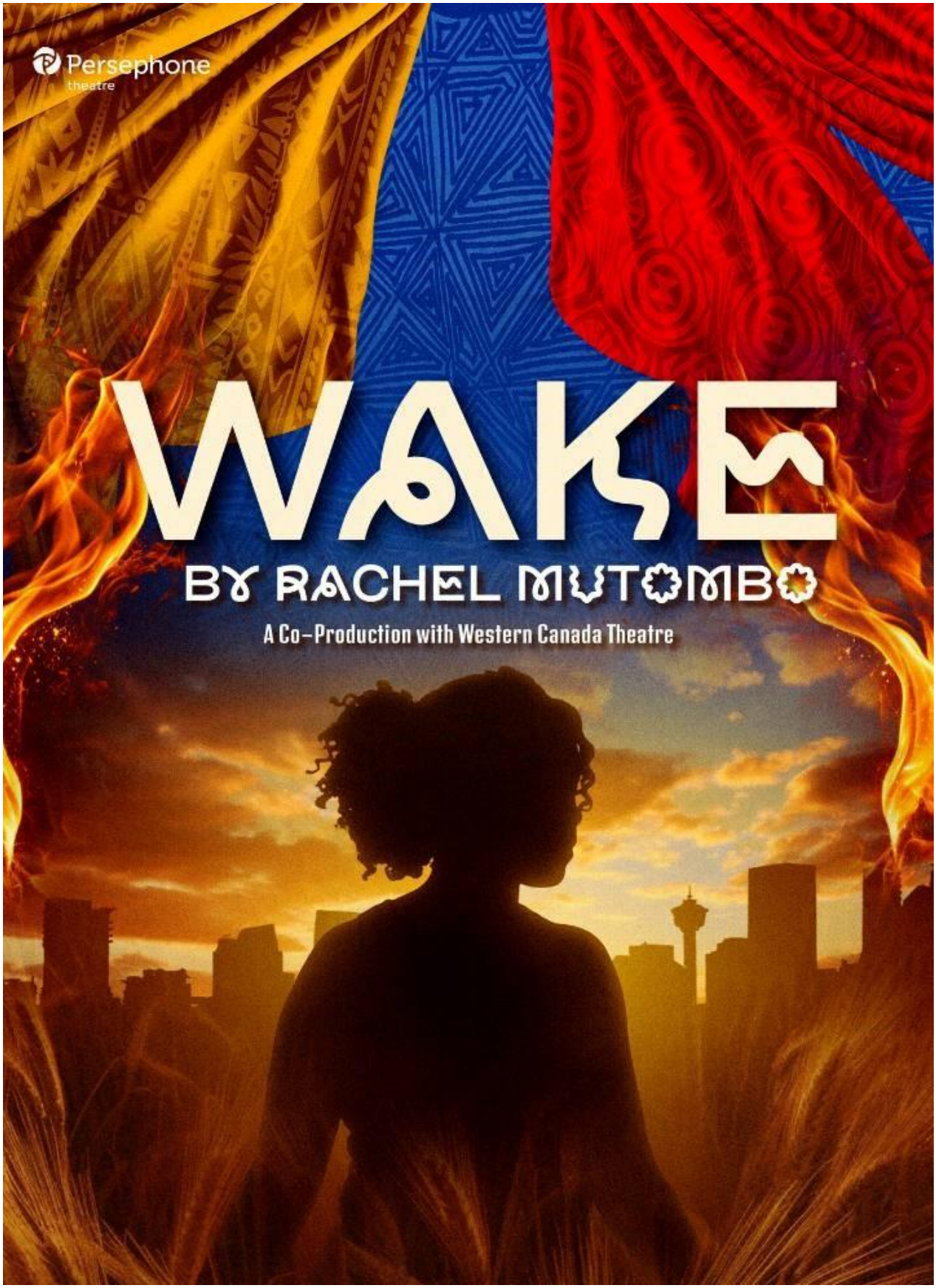


Enrichment Guide

Persephone Theatre is located on the beautiful lands of Indigenous peoples who have lived here since time immemorial, including the Nêhiyawak, Nêhithawak, Anishinabek, Nakawe, Nakota, Nehinawak, Lakota, Dakota and Dene peoples. This place is also the homeland of the Métis. At Persephone, we also like to acknowledge the contributions of the Whitecap Dakota and Round Prairie Métis peoples in establishing our city of Saskatoon. Persephone Theatre is located on Treaty 6 territory and is committed to living in good relations with our Indigenous neighbours, in the spirit with which the Treaties were intended.

THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: *Several of the Persephone School Matinees are integrated with our Subscribers Wednesday Matinee. Our subscribers are paying full price for their tickets and many of them are seniors. Bringing youth and elders together has proven to be important and valuable for both mental health and social skills of all ages, which is one of the reasons why Persephone Theatre decided to program the Wednesday matinees in this way. Some of the seniors in attendance may have hearing or visual impairment, so we ask:*

- ***Students*** *to please be respectful by turning off their phones, not talking, and staying in their seats for the duration of each act.*
- ***Teachers and chaperones*** *please step in when needed to remind students of theatre etiquette.*

Here are some other ways in which the audience can contribute to make this a positive experience for all:

- *If you purchase items at the concession - please be mindful of the noise the packaging can make. Open your bags, packages, and lids before the show starts. The concession is NOT open during the performance, only before the play begins and at intermission.*
- *Try to use the washroom before the show starts. If you cannot wait until intermission, please try to leave the theatre discreetly. Our volunteer ushers will let you know when it is an appropriate moment to return to your seat. You may be seated in an alternate seat upon return.*

What makes theatre unique is that it is a communal experience and we can all work together to make it a positive one for everyone. The actors present the audience with their characters and specific events. The audience in turn responds to the story in real time whether it is through laughing at comedic moments, crying when something meaningful happens, or even gasping in surprise – even if their reactions are not visible or audible, the energy is palpable. Everyone goes home with a special experience to reflect on. And of course, applause is always greatly appreciated.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

CHARACTERS

ESTHER KABONGO - eldest sister, 32, married and pregnant, lives down the street
MIRIAM KABONGO - middle sister, 28, left Alberta right after high school, rarely comes back to visit
RUTH KABONGO - youngest sister, 25, still living at home, medical student at University of Calgary
MAMA JACKIE KABONGO - their mother, widow to Emmanuel Kabongo, immigrated to Canada when Esther was a toddler with her husband
PASTOR FRED – a pastor at the Kabongo family's church
TANTINE BÉATRICE (BÉA) - a member of the church congregation, Mama Jackie's friend

SETTING

Mama Jackie's house in Calgary, AB.

RUNNING TIME

Running time: 2 hours, plus intermission

CONTENT ADVISORY

This play is both funny and emotional while also discussing themes of loss of a loved one and difficult family relationships.

SYNOPSIS

SPOILER ALERT: You can choose not to read or share the synopsis in advance so that you (and those in attendance with you) have the experience of discovering everything in the moment. We leave this to your discretion.

ACT ONE

Miriam Kabongo, the prodigal daughter, receives a call to come home, her father Emmanuel, has died and she needs to return for his wake. At the family home, Mama Jackie, Esther, and Ruth are gathered together. They are in the kitchen, discussing all the food that Mama Jackie has prepared for the wake.

Miriam discovers many things. Ruth drinks a lot and is having an affair with one of her former professors who is married. Esther sleeps at Mama's despite living close by but says nothing is wrong. That evening Miriam finds Mama has set up a bed in the living room because she can't sleep in her own bed without Emmanuel. Mama has been going through a box of books and photos and there is a photo of Mama and Emmanuel on the day of their wedding. Mama tells Miriam she can keep the photo.

Miriam reveals to Esther and Ruth that the book she wrote (that has characters similar to their own family) is going to be turned into a movie. Miriam wants to tell Mama about the film before it is announced publicly. The sisters tell Miriam that their Mama is broke. The life insurance policy is the only money left and they have to get an autopsy in order to receive the money. Mama is refusing to have the autopsy done.

Guests arrive for Emmanuel's wake. The sisters learn that Mama has invited a man who goes by the name Prophet Bandu to the funeral because Emmanuel was one of his followers. Ruth decides to quit medical school in order to travel with her boyfriend.

ACT TWO
Prophet Bandu is late. Mama checks to see if his flight has arrived and discovers that he was arrested at the airport and has been charged with tax evasion, wire fraud, extortion, identity theft and elder fraud. The family finds out that Mama donated almost $19,500 to Bandu. Esther goes into labour. Esther reveals that her husband is in Vancouver for a job interview, and that if he gets the job Esther will divorce him because she does not want to move away from her mother. Ruth and Esther leave for the hospital.

Mama asks Miriam for money to pay for the funeral. Miriam says no. They confront each other about their past. Mama remembers the wedding photo and asks for it back because it is proof of her marriage. Miriam refuses to give it to her and burns it in the fireplace.

SPOILER NOTICE: We've deliberately left things out of this synopsis to ensure audiences have the best viewing experience. If teachers or some patrons feel a strong need for more in depth detail, you can click on the link below for greater detail that contains significant spoilers:
https://persephonetheatre.org/spoilers/

CONTEXT

Elder fraud – Fraud is the number one crime against older Canadians. Though people of all ages can be victims of fraud, older people get targeted more than others, perhaps because they are often home during the day to answer the door or phone; they can be more trusting, and they may not have family or friends close by to ask for a second opinion. A con artist may steal a small amount from many people. They use a variety of ways to reach people, including the Internet, phone calls and even door-to-door visits. Identity theft, credit card fraud, and online phone scams are all forms of fraud. It is important to know the signs of a scam and to teach those who are less technologically inclined some tips to recognize fraudulent behaviour and report it if it happens.

Republic of Congo vs Democratic Republic of Congo – The Congo region in Central Africa is home to two separate countries that, despite sharing a similar name and close geography, possess distinctly different identities: the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo

(D.R.C.). The Congo River, Africa's second longest, became a natural dividing line: one side colonized by the French (now the Republic of the Congo), and the other by the Belgians (now the D.R.C.).

Religion in the D.R.C. – While the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a secular nation, almost 95% of its population identifies as Christian, with 30% being Catholic.

History of instability in the Congo – The Congo has an extensive and dark history of exploitation of the people by the Belgian kingdom for resource extraction through slave labour and violence, followed by political uprisings and dictatorship, resulting in the Second Congo War (August 1998 to July 2003 and greatest loss of life the world has seen since the Second World War).

TEACHERS: You may choose to give greater context to Mama Jackie and Emmanuel's struggles (she briefly mentions he was forced to fight under dictator Mobutu) by diving further into this piece of modern history that is not often talked about in our curriculum. Below are some videos that give an overview of the history:

- **Belgian Congo**
- **Congo and Africa's World War: Crash Course World History 221**

Mobutu – Mobutu Sese Seko was the president who seized power in a 1965 coup and ruled for almost 32 years before being ousted in a rebellion in 1997. He helped in the creation of the independent state of the DRC and moved to Africanize the country to develop the culture of the Congo. He was egregiously corrupt, embezzling billions of dollars from a country nose-diving into extreme poverty under his rule. He held power through an intense totalitarian regime and relied on a close-knit group of handpicked supporters and advisors in his government to push his own agenda at the expense of his people.

GLOSSARY

Fufu – Fufu is a popular traditional dish found in West African cuisine made from a pounded meal made from boiled cassava, green plantains, and cocoyam.

Nzambe na ngai - Oh my god (as footnoted in the script by playwright Rachel Mutumbo). The literal translation in Lingala is "my god is my god".

Lingala – While French is the official language of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lingala is one of the "national" languages and was the official language of Mobutu's military during his rule. Today, it has become the most popular language in the city of Kinshasa and represents modernity and urbanization of the culture, appearing in most popular music and media.

Mundele – Lingalese for "white person".

Tangawizi – Swahili for "ginger", Esther uses it in reference to a ginger beer-style soda or tea she drank when she was sick.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-SHOW

1. Immigrant families often mention the "American Dream" as a goal for their lives in North America to achieve success and happiness. This path often requires great sacrifice. What is a dream, or a big long-term goal that you have, and what might you have to sacrifice for it to come true?
2. What influences the decisions you make? What are the largest factors you consider when making a difficult decision?

POST-SHOW

1. Why are we often hardest on the people we love the most?
2. The relationship between Miriam and her mother is a dysfunctional one. Who do you think is responsible for the deterioration of the relationship? Who is in the wrong in their argument at the end of the play?
3. What did you think the ending of Miriam's book meant? Why was it included in the play?

RESOURCES

Can be film/tv/documentary, books, podcasts, etc.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. **Research**

   These research prompts provide an opportunity for students to extend their learning about the background of the family they witnessed in *Wake*.

   a. *Mourning rituals around the world* – The title of this play, *Wake*, refers to the ceremony or celebration to honour a person who has died. In every culture, we see people honouring their dead through ceremony, community, and tradition, but around the world, these events look very different from one another. Discover the ways of mourning in a culture you might not be familiar with, and report on the traditions and beliefs of that culture.

   b. *My immigration story* – Unless you come from an Indigenous background, your family moved to Canada at some point in history. Talk to your elders and do some research about where your family came from and the story of how and when they arrived. Additionally, include who you were named after or where your name comes from and how that feeds into the story of your family.

   c. *Congolese authors and artists* – Miriam is applauded for her work as a published author, and Tantine Bea notes that there are not many Congolese people who pursue this route. In a jigsaw-style research project, have your students discover a Congolese author or artist that inspires them and report on their work in a visual format, creating a tapestry

of artists from the Congo to display. Encourage them to think about why representation from nations all across the world is important in the art we consume.

2. **Music lesson**

   Tantine Bea enters the wake in a song and dance, meant to celebrate the life of Emmanuel. Music is used for all sorts of celebrations and is integral to the culture of the Congo. Here are some fun videos to learn a Djembe rhythm on the hand drum, as well as a quick video tutorial of some African dance basics to get your class moving.

   - Kassa Djembe Lesson (Beginner-Intermediate)
   - Five(ish) Minute Dance Lesson - African Dance: Lesson 3: Dancing on the Clock

3. **Writing prompts**

   Have students choose a writing prompt that helps them think about *Wake* in greater depth.

   a. *Write What You Know* –Miriam is an author who writes a fictional book inspired by her family, she writes about what she knows – when beginning to write, often the best place to start is to write about what you know. If you were to write a novel, what would it be about? Write a 1-page pitch to a publishing company explaining what your book would be about and what nuanced perspective you may bring to the topic.

   b. *Perspectives* – In *Wake*, the three daughters, despite similar upbringings, have very different perspectives on their mother, their culture and their family life. When secrets are revealed in the play, they then approach the problem or situation from three very different ways. Imagine a scenario or problem that a group has to deal with – for example: a family reunion gone wrong, getting locked out of the house, or finding out a family secret. Now, picture three people you know in your life, or from a show you like, or make some characters up. Try to make them as different from each other as possible. How would those three people respond to the problem? What would be their strategies, their priorities, or their major concerns? How do they differ from the other characters you chose? Write the story of how each person would approach and overcome (or maybe not?) the problem, so you have three different takes on the same event. It is important when writing strong characters that you determine what makes their perspective unique and varied from all of the other characters in your story - it's a ripe opportunity for conflict!

   c. *Fufu (food)* - In the beginning of the play, we see Ruth refuse to eat the fufu because she deems it to be too starchy, and therefore unhealthy. Mama Jackie retorts that her people have eaten this food for generations with no health problems. This is a recurrent misconception across many ancestral diets where they are deemed less healthy or nutritious compared to the Western "standards" or diet. Why do you think that is? What feeds these misconceptions? What does this say about the greater stigmatization of cultural cuisines and food in general? Talk about a food that your family eats/makes and what makes it special.

4. **Three-headed prophet**

   To illustrate the false Prophet Bandu, here is a drama exercise for your students.

To play this improv game, start by dividing your class into groups of three. Each trio is known as a 3-headed prophet! The audience (everyone else in the room) then takes turns to ask this prophet random questions to receive their wisdom, such as "how do I make the perfect sandwich?" or "what's it like to live in space?" or "how can I learn to play the trumpet with my feet?" The prophet's job is to answer these questions. However, each "head" can only say one word at a time. When the trio's satisfied that they have answered the question, each member of the trio has to wave their hands to signal the answer is complete. The audience offers rapturous applause, before asking something else. Each trio should answer around 2 to 3 questions, at which point you move on to the next 3-headed prophet.

RESOURCE LINKS FOR TEACHERS

1. **Commissions - Persephone Theatre**

   Wake was developed as part of Persephone's IBPOC New Play Commission program, which was created in 2020 to centre, support, and produce stories by Canadian artists who identify as Indigenous, Black, or a person of colour. This program is a national competition, and the selected playwright receives a fee for the creation of their script, a full development process involving workshops with a director, dramaturg, and actors, and a commitment to a premiere production on Persephone Theatre's Main Stage in a future season. Keep this in mind if there are any budding playwrights in your class!

2. **Immigration History Educational Package**

   A resource created by Canada's History that discusses immigration to Canada in further depth with some associated lesson plans to initiate greater thinking and connections.

CURRICULAR OUTCOMES

Arts Ed CP6.8 – Play rhythmic ostinatos inspired by music of various cultures, identifying how repetition and variety are achieved.

Arts Ed CR9.1 – Respond to professional dance, drama, music, and visual art works through individual or collaborative inquiry and the creation of one's own arts expressions.

Arts Ed CH6.3 – Investigate arts expressions from a range of cultures and countries, and analyze how cultural identity is reflected in the work.

Arts Ed CH7.1 – Investigate how artists' relationship to place may be reflected in their work.

ELA CC8.1 – Create various visual, oral, written, and multimedia (including digital) texts that explore identity (e.g., Telling One's Life Story), social responsibility (e.g., Examining the Influence of Popular Culture), and efficacy (e.g., Creating Turning Points).

ELA CC9.8b – Write to describe (a description of a scene), to narrate (a personal essay), to explain and inform (a multi-paragraph letter), and to persuade (a letter to the editor).

ELA CR 20.1 – View, listen to, read, comprehend, and respond to a variety of grade-appropriate First Nations, Métis, Saskatchewan, Canadian, and international texts that address: identity (e.g., Relationships with Family and Others); social responsibility (e.g., Evolving Roles and Responsibilities); and social action (agency) (e.g., The Past and the Present).

Heath USC6.1 – Analyze the factors that influence the development of personal standards and identity, and determine the impact on healthy decision making (including cultural norms, societal norms, family values, peer pressures, mass media, traditional knowledge, white privilege, legacy of colonization, and heterosexual privilege).

Social Studies IN6.2 – Examine the social and cultural diversity that exists in the world, as exemplified in Canada and a selection of countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean.

ENRICHMENT GUIDE CONTRIBUTOR BIO

Sam Fairweather

Sam (she/her) is a theatre artist based in Saskatoon on Treaty Six Territory, working as an actor, educator, stage manager, and peacemaker. She is a substitute teacher with Saskatoon Public Schools and loves to teach primary years and math - a strange combo for a teacher who doubles as an artist! Sam was recently informed that she was not chosen to read at her grandmother's funeral, despite being the only one in the family with any public speaking or performing experience. Her grandmother is alive and well.