

Different Ships, Same Boat

Flynn Student Matinee Series Study Guide



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About the Show & Artists

Different Ships, Same Boat is an intimate theatrical performance that weaves together music and storytelling. As co-creator Regie Gibson puts it, the show takes audiences on a journey to “voyage the waves of human love, loss, celebration, survival, and hope.”



The show features guitar, violin, keyboard, and vocals

The performance is structured as a series of chapters, each of which tells a collection of real-world stories through a combination of spoken word and music. The stories were gathered from small towns, cities, and ports of entry to celebrate a diversity of American histories, perspectives, and experiences. The title of the show is drawn from a quote by Civil Rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr: “We may have all come on different ships, but we’re in the same boat now.” In the show, the hosts speak directly to the

audience, reminding us that we’re all sharing this space together. You’ll even be invited to participate in some call-and-response throughout the performance. The show is rich with powerful poetry and a captivating live musical score. The original music you’ll hear draws on classical, contemporary, Ottoman Jewish, and Blues musical influences. The music is performed by a quartet which includes piano, guitar, violin, keyboard, and bass. *Different Ships, Same Boat* was co-created by literary performer Regie Gibson and composer Guy Mendilow. Together they wrote and directed the show, and also perform as co-hosts and narrators, guiding the audience through the performance. As Guy Mendilow says, “in a world that so often wants to stress our differences, *Different Ships, Same Boat* explores what we have in common.”



Regie Gibson

[Regie Gibson](#) is a poet, songwriter, author, and educator who has shared his performances and lectures across two continents and in seven countries. He has collaborated with a broad spectrum of artists, from Mos Def to Kurt Vonnegut to John Legend. He’s won the National Poetry Slam, was selected as an Artist of the Year by the Chicago Tribune, and as of 2025 he is the inaugural poet laureate of Massachusetts.



Guy Mendilow

[Guy Mendilow](#) is a composer, musician, and self-described “storycatcher” who has been performing music professionally since the age of 10 in venues including Carnegie Hall, Boston’s Symphony Hall, and across the world. He makes work at the intersection of social belonging and the arts, exploring how artistic experiences can bring people together across differences.

Community Building through Story and Song

Guy and Regie are also Co-Artistic Directors of Arts for Social Cohesion (ASC), an organization which combines moving artistic experiences with social psychology practices to strengthen relationships across and within communities. [Social psychology](#) is the study of how our thoughts, feelings, and behavior are influenced by interpersonal relationships and our social environments.

Their mission is driven by the beliefs “that every person has a story that matters, that being seen and understood is a basic human need, and that artists, and the performing arts, can contribute in necessary, unique ways to seemingly disparate realms.”



Listening Labs feature storytelling, music, and sand art animation

One of ASC’s programs is called [Listening Labs](#), in which performers tell stories through spoken word, music and animation, which lead into forums where audience members share their own stories through facilitated, courageous conversations. The experience includes solo, partner, small group and full-group conversation and written prompts for the audience to engage with. These Labs are not about getting strangers to agree with each other – they’re about listening and being understood. A guiding question brought to the audience is: what are the backstories leading you to be who you are, see what you see, know what you know?

Arts for Social Cohesion is one of several organizations that utilize personal storytelling to bring people together. One of the most well-known such organizations is [StoryCorps](#), which was founded in 2003. Since then, they have helped nearly 700,000 people across the U.S. engage in meaningful conversations about their lives. They record these stories and collect them in an [online archive](#), which is now the largest single collection of human voices ever gathered. Their goal

is to preserve and share stories of the American experience, and to foster empathy and compassion through personal storytelling.

In addition to airing their stories weekly on NPR, you can engage with StoryCorps through their podcast, animated shorts, and best-selling books.

As StoryCorps founder David Isay says, “You cannot hate a person once you’ve listened to their story.”



A StoryCorps booth in NYC's Grand Central, where personal stories are captured

Musical Influences

One of the influences behind the original music and score in this show is **the blues**.

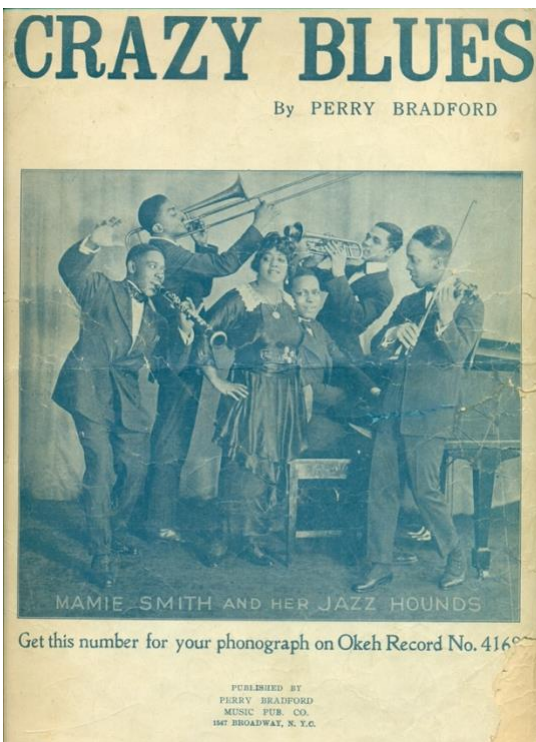
“The blues was a musical response to the experiences of African Americans in the rural south,” [says Jazz at Lincoln Center saxophone player Camille Thurman](#). “It recognizes the pain of lost love and injustice, and gave expression to the victory outlasting a broken heart in facing down adversity.” This musical style emerged in the mid-1800s, evolving from spirituals, hymns, and work songs sung by enslaved Black people. It is an expressive musical form, capable of transmitting a wide range of emotion, often including sadness and grief. Originally the genre was played primarily by traveling solo musicians who would accompany their singing with acoustic guitar, piano, or harmonica.

In 1912, W.C. Handy – the Black American leader of a dance orchestra – became one of the first people to transcribe and publish sheet music for a blues song, “Memphis Blues,” elevating a broader public awareness of the genre. In 1920 Mamie Smith would be the first Black female vocalist to record a blues song, “Crazy Blues,” which sold more



W.C. Handy, known as the father of the blues

than a million copies.



Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" sold over a million copies

Blues continued to evolve throughout the [Great Migration](#), which began in 1915, as Black communities moved away from the south and the horrors of life under Jim Crow laws. In 1943 blues musician Muddy Waters incorporated electric guitar and added more instruments for a fuller sound, birthing an electrified form of the blues which paved the way for the development of genres like rhythm and blues as well as rock and roll.

Ottoman Jewish cantigas are another musical influence in this show. Sephardic Jews are descendants of Jews who were expelled from Spain in the late 15th century, and it's also a descriptor for Jewish communities in Arab-Muslim and North African regions. The Jews who were expelled from Spain became refugees in Europe as well as in the Ottoman Empire, and they brought with them their cultural traditions – including music. Cantigas are generally love songs, or songs of longing and mourning, and often are sung at weddings. Over time, musical influences from local cultures



An antique map of the Ottoman Empire, circa 1450

were integrated into the traditions they carried. In some cantigas, you can hear influences from opera, fox-trot, tango, and popular songs from Turkey, Greece, and Italy.

In this show, you'll hear Regie perform **spoken word poetry**. This genre emerged out of the [jazz poetry](#) of the 1920s – a form of poetry developed by

Black American artists that imitates jazz music in its rhythm and style. During the Civil Rights era, spoken word poetry became a powerful tool of political resistance, and Black political poetry paved the way for the musical genre of hip-hop. The first poetry slam was started in Chicago in 1984 by construction worker and poet Marc Smith, and the concept spread around the world. According to [The Poetry Foundation](#), spoken word poetry is characterized by rhyme, repetition, improvisation, and word play. It often incorporates elements of storytelling, theater, music, rap, and many other art forms.

NYC's [Nuyorican Poets Café](#) has been a hub of performance poetry since its founding in 1973. It was originally founded to showcase the work of poets, playwrights, and musicians of color whose work was not accepted in mainstream academia, entertainment, and publishing. The Café has won numerous awards and hosts weekly programming that draws thousands of audience members each year and their education program reaches thousands of students and school groups annually.



A poetry performance at the Nuyorican Poets Café

Reflection Questions:

Here are some example questions to prompt deeper engagement from your students, both before and after the show:

Before the Show:

- Have you ever been to a theater before? What are some ways an audience is expected to behave in a theater that are different from how you behave in other places you go for entertainment, like a movie theater?
- Why do you think personal storytelling is important for building community?
- What is a story about yourself that defines something about who you are?

After the Show:

- How did the show make you feel? Was there a specific moment when it caused an emotional reaction in you? How did it do that? What did the show make you think about?
- If you were to write a review of the show, what would you say? What stood out to you? Would you recommend it to other people? Why?
- Which stories from the show stood out to you the most? Why?
- Why do you think the creators of the show decided to combine music with storytelling? How did the music support the storytelling, or impact your experience as you listened?

Resources

- [Different Ships, Same Boat \(Teaser / Promo\)](#)
- [Listening Labs: Stories to Strengthen Communities](#)
- [Poet Laureate Regie Gibson](#)
- [Guy Mendilow Ensemble](#)
- [The StoryCorps Archive](#)
- [Exploring the Blues \(Jazz at Lincoln Center\)](#)
- [What is the Blues? \(PBS\)](#)
- [Songs of Sefardi Jews](#)
- [Cantiga \(Jewish Musical Research Centre\)](#)
- [A Short History of Spoken Word Poetry](#)
- [Jazz and the Great Migration \(Jazz at Lincoln Center\)](#)
- [Understanding Social Psychology](#)