



## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The American Voices (AV) project, a pilot program funded by American Express, provided Social Studies and Theater teachers with a unique opportunity to collaborate across core curriculums –exploring 20<sup>th</sup> Century American history and culture with students through a theatrical lens.

The NYC Office of Arts and Special Projects (OASP) assembled an American Voices Committee of diverse educators to develop and write the curriculum. The Committee included three Social Studies teachers and five Theater teachers (from NYC public schools) as well as three Artist Educators representing the New York City Cultural community.

By partnering Artist Educators in tandem with the NYC teachers, OASP intentionally expanded the curricular perspective to include both classroom and professional theater experience and knowledge. Thus, the school based teachers were able to address standards and existing curricular goals while the outside partners offered insights into current and ongoing production practices and trends.

As Social Studies curriculum is taught chronologically, the Committee determined the AV project should be organized accordingly in contrast to a thematic structure. Utilizing Social Studies curriculum standards, we identified five key eras: studying the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. We concluded the era focus at the 1960s as Social Studies teachers rarely have time to study beyond this era.

Thus, eight plays were chosen as the foundation of American Voices: 1920's (*Inherit the Wind*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*); 1930s (*Of Mice and Men*, *Awake and Sing!*); 1940s (*All My Sons*); 1950s (*Death of a Salesman*, *A Raisin in the Sun*); and 1960s (*HAIR*). In addition to the artistic and contextual merit, many of these plays are already found in literacy curriculums. Therefore schools could easily access scripts for student study.

Each play has a strong voice and follows an overarching theme of the "American Dream." Most of these plays are suitable for either Middle or High school students. However, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *HAIR* were recommended for High School study due to the language and nature of the works.



By pairing a Social Studies teacher with a Theatre (or English) teacher to team teach the curriculum, AV enhances teacher instruction and student learning. Teachers can appreciate their subject matter in a larger context. Additionally, students experience the historical context of these plays while simultaneously learning about the cultural impact on history.

Based on feedback from teachers and cultural partners, the Committee determined that each unit would contain four to five lesson plans. The Committee consciously addressed differentiation of student learning activities within each lesson. Whether participating in a mock trial, crafting a blues song, or writing a reflective essay, students actively learn about theatre and social studies.

Once the lesson plans were developed, Professional Development sessions were organized to train teachers in the implementation of the American Voices project.