

AMERICAN DOCUMENT

[Tom/Stephen]

Ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

This is a theatre—as you can see.

The place is here in the United States of America—as you know.

And the time is now—tonight.

The characters are:

The dance group, Katherine, Miki, Blakeley, Tadej, Carrie, Samuel, Jennifer, Ben, Lloyd, Maurizio.

You, the audience.

The Interlocutor—I am Tom, the Interlocutor.

And Barney and Ellen and Akiko and Leon and Kelly.

EPISODE ONE: The Democratic Process

WALT WHITMAN

[Tom/Stephen]
Leaves of Grass

[Kelly]
O take my hand Walt Whitman!
Such gliding wonders! such sights and sounds!
Such join'd unended links, each hook'd to the next,
Each answering all, each sharing the earth with all.

What widens within you, Walt Whitman?
What waves and soils exuding?
What climes? what persons and cities are here?
Who are the infants, some playing, some slumbering?
Who are the girls? who are the married women?
Who are the groups of old men going slowly with their arms about each other's necks
What rivers are these? what forests and fruits are these?
What are the mountains call'd that rise so high in the mists?
What myriads of dwellings are they fill'd with dwellers?

What do you hear, Walt Whitman?
I hear the workman singing and the farmer's wife singing,
I hear in the distance the sounds of children and of animals early in the day,
I hear the Spanish dance with castanets in the chestnut shade, to the rebeck and guitar,
I hear fierce French liberty songs,
I hear of the Italian boat-sculler the musical recitative of old poems....

What do you see, Walt Whitman?
Who are they you salute, and that one after another salute you?

AMERICANA

[Tadej & Katherine]
Main Street

[Tom/Stephen]
This is America—
a town of a few thousand,
in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little groves.

The town is, in our tale, called "Gopher Prairie, Minnesota."
But its Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere.
The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana,
in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois,
and not very differently would it be told Up York State
or in the Carolina hills.

Main Street is the climax of civilization.
That this Ford car might stand in front of the Bon Ton Store,
Hannibal invaded Rome and Erasmus wrote in Oxford cloisters.
What Ole Jenson the grocer says to Ezra Stowbody the banker
is the new law for London, Prague, and the unprofitable isles of the sea; whatsoever
Ezra does not know and sanction,
that thing is heresy, worthless for knowing and wicked to consider.

Our railway station is the final aspiration of architecture.
Sam Clark's annual hardware turnover
is the envy of the four counties which constitute God's Country.
In the sensitive art of the Rosebud Movie Palace there is a Message,
and humor strictly moral.

Such is our comfortable tradition and sure faith.
Would he not betray himself an alien cynic
who should otherwise portray Main Street,
or distress the citizens
by speculating whether there may not be other faiths?

GREEN GROW THE LILACS

[Tom/Stephen]

And now we return to "Green Grow the Lilacs" by Lynn Riggs

AUNT ELLER [Ellen]

Oh, I see you, Mr. Curly McClain!

Don't need to be a-hidin' 'hind that horse of your'n.

You may as well come on in.

[Curly appears again at the window.]

CURLY [Barney]

Hi, Aunt Eller.

AUNT ELLER

Skeer me to death!

Whut're you doin' around here?

CURLY

Come a-singin' to you

only you never give me no time to finish.

AUNT ELLER

Go on and finish then.

Why, if I wasn't an old womern,

and if you wasn't so young and smart-alecky--

why, I'd marry you and git you to set around at night

and sing to me.

CURLY

I wouldn't marry you ner none of yer kinfolks, I coud he'p it.

AUNT ELLER

Oh! None of my kinfolks neither, huh?

CURLY

And you c'n tell 'em, all of 'em,

includin' that niece of your'n.

AUNT ELLER

Mr. Cowboy!

A-ridin' high, wise and handsome,

his spurs a-jinglin'.

CURLY

So, she desn't take to me much, huh?

Whur'd you git such a uppity niece

'at she wouldn't pay no heed to me?

Well, whut else does she want then,

the damn she-mule?

AUNT ELLER

I don't know. But I'm shore sartin it ain't you.

CURLY

Anh! Quit it, you'll have me a-cryin'!

AUNT ELLER

You better sing me a song then!

CURLY

Aw, what'll I sing then?

AUNT ELLER

A-ridin' ole Paint.

You sing.

Maybe she gonna overhear you, wherever she is!

CURLY

A ridin' ole Paint and a-leadin' old Dan,

I'm gin to Montana for to throw the hoolian.

They feed in the hollers as they water in the draw,

Their tails are all matted and their backs are all raw.

Ride around the little dogies, ride around them slow,

For the fiery and the snuffy are a-rarin' to go....

CROSSFIRE WALK

EPISODE TWO: The Golden Door

A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN

[Tom/Stephen]

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn

[Kelly]

For me,

my early morning impression

was of young boys streaming out of tenements

to go to the synagogue to say kaddish for a departed parent

before going to school,

and maybe also carrying up a fifty-pound bag of coal

before breakfast.

Everybody worked all the time,

and if there was no job,

people worked at something;

they sorted rags or sewed garments,

or fixed flowers and feathers for hat manufacturers.

People scrabbled for a little living.

They did everything for their children.

My son will be a doctor, they'd say,

or a lawyer, maybe a teacher.

I never heard anyone express lesser hopes for his child.

A man peddled fourteen hours, maybe,

and brought home two dollars after he paid off his merchandise

and his cart hire,

or he brought home eleven dollars a week

from the factory for fifty-four hours' work.

Who has ever seen such optimism anywhere on earth?

The night before High Holy Days--

everything would become quiet--

that whole teeming district of tenements

would suddenly come to a complete halt.

You'd see workingmen with shiny faces

coming out of the public baths

and walking home and holding hands with their sons,

and you've never seen its equal for brightness and happiness.

Where else on earth, among the poorest people,

did you see in every home a blue-and-white box

where you were supposed to put your pennies?

Once a week

an old woman would come around and empty it

and off it would go somewhere overseas--

the poorest of the poor helping still poorer ones

across the Atlantic somewhere.

Hundreds of sweatshop employees,
men and women who sat at machines for nine and ten hours a day
came home,
washed up,
had supper,
and went to the lodge hall or settlement houses
to learn English
or to listen to a fellow read poetry to them.
PAID readers of poetry. I saw it.
I saw gangsters and bums,
but I also saw poets,
settlement workers,
welfare workers,
scribes,
teachers,
philosophers,
all hoping and striving for one goal--
to break away--
and they did, too--
and so they made room for new immigrants.

DANCER COMPOSITIONS EN MASSE

JACK KEROUAC

[Leon]

Hopping a freight out of Los Angeles
at high noon one day in late September
I got on a gondola
and lay down with my duffel bag under my head
and my knees crossed
and contemplated the clouds
as we rolled north to Santa Barbara.

[Tom/Stephen]

Jack Kerouac

[Leon]

It was a local
and I intended to sleep on the beach at Santa Barbara that night
and catch either another local to San Luis Obispo the next morning
or the firstclass freight all the way to San Francisco at seven p.m.
Somewhere near Camarillo
where Charlie Parker'd been mad and relaxed back to normal health,
a thin old little bum climbed into my gondola
as we headed into a siding to give a train right of way
and looked surprised to see me there.

He established himself at the other end of the gondola and lay down
facing me,
with his head on his own miserably small pack
and said nothing.
By and by they blew the highball whistle
and we pulled out as the air got colder
and fog began to glow from the sea over the warm valleys of the coast.

Pretty soon

we headed into another siding at a small railroad town
and I figured I needed a poorboy of Tokay wine
to complete the cold dusk run to Santa Barbara.
"Will you watch my pack while I run over there
and get a bottle of wine?"
"Sure thing."

I jumped over the side and ran across Highway 101
to the store, and bought, besides wine, a little bread and candy.
I ran back to my freight train
which had another fifteen minutes to wait in the now warm sunny scene.
The bum was sitting cross legged at his end
before a pitiful repast of one can of sardines.
I took pity on him and said,
"How about a little wine to warm you up?
Maybe you'd like some bread and cheese with your sardines."

I reminded myself of the line in the Diamond Sutra that says,
“Practice charity without holding in mind any conceptions about charity,
for charity after all is just a word.”

I was very devout in those days
and was practicing my religious devotions almost to perfection.
Since then I’ve become a little hypocritical about my lip-service
and a little tired and cynical.

Because now I am grown so old and neutral....

But then I really believed in the reality of charity
and kindness
and humility
and zeal

and neutral tranquillity and wisdom and ecstasy,
and I believed that I was an oldtime bhikku in modern clothes
wandering the world

(usually the immense triangular arc of New York to Mexico City to San Francisco)

in order to turn the wheel of the True Meaning,

or Dharma,

and gain merit for myself as a future Buddha (Awakener)

and as a future Hero in Paradise.

CROSSFIRE WALK

EPISODE THREE: Absolute Equality

A GREAT FEMINIST STATEMENT

[Ellen]

A Great Feminist Statement

[Ellen & Female Ensemble]

In many ways, I suspect my feminism is fairly bourgeois.
 I don't want a revolution that doesn't allow me to dance, flirt, and buy shoes. On the other hand, my feminism is fairly absolute in that I will not allow myself (or others) to demonize "radical feminists" or to ignore poor women or women of color, and I object very strongly when I see women fighting with each other over crumbs. I'm sure I do it too, sometimes, but I try very hard not to. My feminism is material in the sense that I believe that the body is irreducible (more and more so, as I age, and more since becoming a mother). I do not believe that there are no differences between men and women; but I believe that what differences there are have been vastly exaggerated by social conditioning, and I reject essentialism. My feminism likes men, and is sympathetic to the ways that they, too, suffer from narrow definitions of gender. My feminism insists on being heard, and will not give up a fight, and will not back down. On the other hand, my feminism deplures unfairness, meanness, and insensitivity. I believe in principles, including the principle that people matter. I believe in forgiveness and second chances, and in teaching, and in learning; and I also believe in having high expectations and firm boundaries. My feminism is polemical but embraces ambiguities. My feminism is aggressive and protective.

MEN'S DANCE

WHO'S ON FIRST

[Tom/Stephen]
Who's on first?

[Ellen]
How do you mean?

You know: who's on first?

In what sense?

In the sense that, you know:
I'm trying to start a conversation with you.
Like:
who's on first?

What the fuck do you mean?

What the fuck do you mean's on second.

I beg your pardon.

I beg your pardon's on third.

What?

No, what's on first.

This is what you call a conversation?
Because this is the kind of conversations people have these days?
Because of
what?
because of the internet and texting and shit
this is how people communicate with one another?

I'm sorry:
I thought you'd get my classical reference.

Your classical reference?

You know I think
for most Americans I mean
we have SOME sense of history.
There are SOME things we have in common
you know
that we share
that we all know
like values
and people we've heard of

and stories
and things we believe
in common!
Like, because,
in most countries you know
like in France you can't be French unless you're French
and, if you move to China, you never become Chinese
but, in America,
if you come to America
and you promise to support the Constitution, then that makes you an American.
It's a social contract.
We are the only country there is really
that is a country because we all agree to live together
and that's the whole deal.
We have these common values and these common agreements
and these common things we've all agreed to hold in common.
So that's why
when I say "who's on first"
I kind of expect you to say
no, who's on second
what's on first.

I don't know's on third.

Exactly.

Oh. Right. Beg your pardon.

No problem!

AMERICAN DOCUMENT DUET
[Katherine & Sam]

CROSSFIRE WALK

EPISODE FOUR: The Empire

VIETNAM OR IRAQ

[Ellen]

The time a car came towards us,
 when, just five minutes before, another car had come
 and there were four Palestinians in it with RPGs
 and they killed three of my friends.
 So this new Peugeot comes towards us,
 and we shoot.
 And there was a family there--
 three children.
 And I cried,
 but I couldn't take the chance.
 Children, father, mother.
 All the family was killed,
 but we couldn't take the chance.

[Barney]

When we cleaned out a terrorist prison camp
 we took a woman prisoner.
 I'd already told my men we took no prisoners,
 but I'd never killed a woman.
 "She has to die fast," my sergeant said.
 I was sweating.
 The woman said to me,
 what's the matter? you're sweating.
 "Not for you," I said, "It's a malaria recurrence."
 I gave my pistol to my sergeant,
 but he couldn't do it.
 None of them would do it,
 and I knew if I didn't do it,
 I'd never be able to control that unit again
 "You're sweating," she said again.
 "Not for you," I said.
 And I blew her fucking head off.

[Akiko]

We came one time, my squad,
 into the house of a prominent community leader,
 and shot him
 and shot his wife
 shot his married son
 his daughter-in-law,
 a male and female servant and their baby.
 The family dog was clubbed to death,
 the family cat was strangled,
 the goldfish was scooped out of his fishbowl and tossed on the floor.
 When our squad left,
 no life remained in the house--
 a "family unit" had been eliminated.

[Tom/Stephen & Male Ensemble]

I had a friend,
 a psychologist,
 who did an experiment on rats when he was a student in the university,
 and when he finished his experiment,
 he was faced with the problem
 of what to do with the rats.

He asked his advisor,
 and his advisor said:
 "Sacrifice them."

My friend said: "How?"

And his advisor said:
 "Like this."

And his advisor took hold of a rat
 and bashed its head against the side of a workbench.

My friend felt sick,
 and asked his advisor how he could do that--
 even though, in fact, as my friend knew,
 this was not exactly a cruel way to kill a rat,
 since instant death is caused
 by cervical dislocation.

And his advisor said to him:

"What's the matter?"

Maybe you're not
 cut out to be a psychologist.

How would you kill a rat?

I don't know.

If you had to.

Hanging by the wrists,

burning with cigarettes
 burning with an iron
 hosing with water

hitting with fists
 kicking with boots
 hitting with truncheons
 hitting with whips

exposing to cold showers
 depriving of sleep
 depriving of toilets
 depriving of food
 subjecting to abuse
 beating with fists and clubs
 hitting the genitals
 hitting the head against the wall

electric shocks used on the head
on the genitals
on the feet
on the lips
on the eyes
on the genitals
hitting with fists
whipping with cables
strapping to crosses
caning on the backside
caning on the limbs
inserting sticks
inserting heated skewers
inserting bottle necks
pouring on boiling water
injecting with haloperidol
chlorpromazine
trifluoperazine
beating on the skull
cutting off the fingers
submerging in water
breaking of limbs
smashing of jaws
crushing of feet
breaking of teeth
cutting the face
removing the finger nails
wrapping in plastic
closing in a box
castrating
multiple cutting

WHAT IS AN AMERICAN?

#1

[Tom/Stephen]

What is an American?

In 1782 Jean de Crèvecoeur published Letters from an American Farmer in which he defined an American as a “descendent of Europeans” who, if he were “honest, sober and industrious,” prospered in a welcoming land of opportunity which gave him choice of occupation and residence. Students will look at life histories from the interviews of everyday Americans conducted by Works Progress Administration officials between 1936-1940 to see if his definition still holds true in this country 150 years later. Students will conclude by working toward a modern definition.

Objectives

Students will:

1. understand that the meaning of “being an American” has enlarged and become more complicated since 1782;
2. recognize key ideas from a famous document of American history;
3. become familiar with rich on-line collections of primary sources;
4. be able to read an oral history and use such materials in historical analysis;
5. be able to use simple on-line search techniques; and
6. be able to combine text and graphics in a single document. (optional)

Time Required:

Two weeks

Recommended

Grade Level:

Grades 8-12

WHAT IS AN AMERICAN QUESTIONING

Tom/Stephen questions members of the company, one after another with “What is an American?”

Each person responds in their native respective languages, except Leon, who also responds in Japanese.

- 1) Maurizio
- 2) Tadej
- 3) Akiko & Miki
- 4) Leon

#2

[Kelly]

I would never think to go to someone's home
and try to change the decor, style or color of it.

I would never think to go to someone's home
and tell them what kind of schedule to keep;
how to live;

how to spend their money; etc, etc, etc.

I find it so very offensive to have these people here in our country –
our neighborhoods--our stores---out in public---
with their faces covered;

playing prayers over the loud speakers;

and NOT SPEAKING ENGLISH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

YOU ARE IN MY COUNTRY---MY HOME----

DRESS THE DRESS;

TALK THE TALK;

BE AMERICAN CITIZENS!!!

You don't like our ways?---

then don't come here!

Don't ask for social security and hand-outs either.

It is MY money that pays these taxes for you to come over
and 'take over' MY home!

Women here in America fought hard to get where we are today,
and by gosh, you are not only bringing the women down,
but the entire country and what we stand for and fought for!

AND TALK ENGLISH for crying out loud!

And just because you may be a Male Muslim,

don't think that I for one minute will step aside for you in the grocery store. Who in the
heck do YOU think YOU are?

YOU are the second-class citizen here---NOT ME!

I am an American female who has worked hard for everything I have---
and put up with crap all my life from male chauvinists

who have brains no bigger than my fingernail---!

I didn't tell these men to get thier own coffee at work;

type thier own papers at work;

and fight to be paid and treated equally

only to have these submissive Muslim women come here
to throw all that away!

GO HOME!

We don't want you here.

You scare us!!!

#3

[Tom/Stephen]

What is an American?

[Katherine]

What is an American?

[Barney & Katherine]

I mean we are an empire

but we used to stand for certain values

we HAD certain values

I mean we still have values

but what are they?

because here we are now in a global society

and you can't say this point of view or that point of view

is the only privileged point of view in the world

because there are lots of points of view

and they are all entitled to respect

or a lot of them are

and so you don't just have this one vision of things that is almighty

but you have to navigate this far more complex global civilization

cosmopolitanism!

pretty soon you're talking cosmopolitanism

as well as respect for others

and not just respect

but enabling others to flourish

enabling others to have lives that flourish as well as your own

and you could say this is some sort of fundamental democratic ethos

and it is!

it is!

but it's almost more than fundamental

it's complicated

and full of a world

that doesn't really benefit from going to war

and would benefit from good health care for everyone

and money

food and clothing and shelter

no poverty

no second class citizens

or third class

or women who are just tyrannized over

or anyone else who is tyrannized over

so I think that's where you end up

with an American

when you say what is an American

you are talking about a global person

of global empathy and compassion

and depth and complexity

and individualism

and also communalism
and um
someone who loves sports
or opera
or
you know
something that brings some extra pleasure to life
like looking at the autumn leaves
so life is not all work and anguish
but also some fundamental okayness
plus pleasure.
For everyone.
Equally.

FULL COMPANY DANCE

#4

[Tom]

What is an American?

[Akiko]

My family always said to me, when I was growing up:

Why Learn Italian?

That's what they wanted to know.

And my family is Italian!

They wanted us to be good Americans.

You ask to learn Italian and they say -

"Why you wanna learn that stuff?"

Of course, we managed to learn to swear in the mother tongue,
but beyond that we were stymied.

I recently saw a documentary with Martin Scorsese

and he complained of the same thing -

him who I pictured as being steeped in all things Italian!

Which is all the more inspiration -

at least for me -

to preserve as much as we still can of our heritage.

It doesn't make us any less American -

and what is an American anyway

if not an amalgamation of the best the world has to offer?

EPISODE FIVE: Recalling the Promise

BLOG

[Leon]

Eww its was raining so hard today.

I went to the mall at Grand Ave Newton in Queens.

Wow I havent been in a mall since i got here and i spent around 100 dollars. Im happy i found a forever 21.

But i spent most of my money at Macy's.

Nothing else happend today.

We didnt get to go clubbing this weekend

cuz the line was too long

and we had to get in before 12 to be free

and we were there at 1130.

Heheh.

I went to Bang Bang with my friend

and i bought a top but i think I look like a slut in it.

Im not too much for clubbing clothes..

I always feel naked in them.

It has been brought to my attention

that some of my friends think I act more like a guy then a girl somtimes. Heheh.

Yeah I guess soo.

I used to be a tomboy when i was like 10.

I say stupid things sometimes

and i seem to get into fights alot latley.

I dont like soap operas and i hate romatic movies.

I like action and kung-fu movies.

But I think im acting more girly now since i moved to NYC..

THE KID FROM BROOKLYN DOT COM

[Ellen]

a three hundred pound guy in a wife beater undershirt
his hair slicked back, wearing sunglasses,
sitting in a black leather desk chair in his office,
shelves with stuff on them,
papers on the table next to him,
his shirt tossed over something behind him.

He speaks:

Hey, the big man's back. www. the kid from brooklyn.com.
You know, the big man got up this morning
you know I felt like having a hot cup of coffee
and a piece of pound cake
I wound up in one of them Starbucks you know
I knew the joint wasn't right soon as I walked in you know
I seen these people sitting on couches
lounge chairs
whatever they were fucking drinking
they looked like fucking ice cream cones
fucking mounds of fucking whipped cream
and fucking all kinds of shit on top you know
finally I get up to the girl
she says you want an el grande?
you want a chocolate latte?
carmelo latte?
cherry lite?
I say listen honey
I don't know what kind of fucking place this is
I just want a large fucking coffee
and a fresh piece of fucking pound cake you know
she says that's seven dollars
plus she had the fucking balls
to have a fucking tip cup over there
she expect me to give her a fucking tip
I says seven fucking dollars for a fucking coffee
and a fucking pound cake?
fucking stick it
I went right around the corner to fucking Pancake House
I take an oath to my mother
I take the fucking breakfast special
two eggs over, home fries
bacon, sausage, two pancakes
all the coffee you can drink
threw in a shot of fucking OJ
and for an extra buck and a half
they gave me a fucking cheese danish
I walked out of there fucking stuffed
cost me eight and a quarter for the whole fucking ball o' wax

I could have eat the rest of the fucking day
what's a fucking working man supposed to do?
you go to one of them fucking Starbucks
the poor working guy
what do they think they're fucking serving over there?
fucking liquid gold?
fucking cup of coffee and a piece of pound cake
for seven dollars?
stick it up your ass, fucking Starbucks!
what about the fucking working man?
anyway, thinking about it
this is the old Big Man
www.thekidfrombrooklyn.com
and the Big Man's always happy to see you.

WALT WHITMAN

[Tom/Stephen]

What do you see, Walt Whitman?

Who are they you salute, and that one after another salute you?

I see a great round wonder rolling through space,
I see diminute farms, hamlets, ruins, graveyards, jails, factories, palaces, hovels, huts of
barbarians, tents of nomads upon the surface....
I see the tracks of the railroads of the earth....
I see the filaments of the news of the wars, deaths, losses, gains, passions, of my race...
I see the site of the old empire of Assyria, and that of Persia, and that of India....
I see the battlefields of the earth, grass grows upon them and blossoms and corn....
I see all the menials of the earth, laboring,
I see all the prisoners in the prisons,
I see the defective human bodies of the earth,
The blind, the deaf and dumb, idiots, hunchbacks, lunatics,
The pirates, thieves, betrayers, murderers, slave-makers of the earth,
The helpless infants, and the helpless old men and women.

I see the male and female everywhere,
I see the serene brotherhood of philosophs,
I see the constructiveness of my race,
I see the results of perseverance and industry of my race,
I see ranks, colors, barbarisms, civilizations, I go among them, I mix indiscriminately,
And I salute all the inhabitants of the earth.

OBAMA

A resounding speech from Obama,
which will change every time the piece is done
so that the speech will be something he just said
the previous week
or a few days before the performance.

THE VOICE OF A FIVE YEAR OLD

Well, I'm going to take Math
and history
and we have to take English
and then I think I'd like to take a dance class
and I want to write poetry!

[Tom/Stephen]

Ladies and gentlemen, we wish you good night.