

# black odyssey

Show Guide

# WELCOME

We're delighted to share this Show Guide for *black odyssey*, which gives you a deeper look into this production.

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# A NOTE FROM JILL RAFSON

## CSC PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Homer's *The Odyssey* dates back to the 7th or 8th century BCE, and here we are in 2023, in a world filled with customs and technologies and lives that Homer could hardly have imagined, and we still can't stop talking about *The Odyssey*.



Here at Classic Stage Company, we often talk about why some stories stand the test of time. Why do some tales serve only one moment, quickly evaporating the second they're complete, and why do others stay with us, resonating far beyond their moment of creation?

With *The Odyssey*, we follow a man who is returning from a foreign war, when obstacle after obstacle is thrown into his path, preventing him from reaching home for many years. The variety of hurdles in his way will test every facet of his character, thrown at him by a vengeful god determined to prevent our hero from reuniting with his family.

In other words: A journey. Challenges that make that journey difficult. Hindrances so impossible to comprehend that it feels like some unknown force of fate must be pulling the strings. I think most of us can easily relate to the most basic elements of that story.

For our playwright, Marcus Gardley, the journey of Odysseus (called Ulysses in Latin) sparked him to examine the challenges faced by Black Americans and the difficult journey of trying to understand how their lives were shaped by so many decisions over which they had no control. He also asks us to consider: what happens when they push back against seemingly predetermined outcomes and find their way towards whatever "home" might mean, whether literal or metaphysical?

By digging into one specific point of view, *black odyssey* actually becomes universal. The play illustrates how we can all see ourselves in this story and asks us, this time, to go on this journey from the perspective of the Black community, taking us into a Harlem as ancient and worthy of epic treatment as anything in Greece. For CSC, it's this repositioning of Homer's original that makes *black odyssey* a classic in its own right.



# THE ODYSSEY: A HISTORY AND SUMMARY

A fierce and powerful sorceress who turns men into pigs, a nail-biting battle with a giant monster, and enchanting sirens who lure sailors to their deaths. These tales could stand on their own as a thrilling story, but each of them is only a fraction of Homer's epic, 12,000-line poem, *The Odyssey*. The ancient story inspired Marcus Gardley's *black odyssey*, which is set in the aftermath of the Iraq War in Harlem, NY.

*The Odyssey* is considered a sequel to Homer's first (and only other known) epic poem, *The Iliad*, which centers on the Trojan War. Both poems were written down around 750 B.C.E., but audiences were more likely to have heard the poem than to have read it. Some believe it was never meant to be read at all and was often performed by professional epic poem reciters known as "rhapsodes," who came to prominence during Panathenaic performance festivals in Athens between 500–600 B.C.E.



Ulysses and the Sirens, 1909 by Herbert James Draper (1864-1920)



*The Odyssey* does not start at the beginning of the protagonist's journey. Instead, the reader begins "in medias res" or "in the middle of things," learning about previous events through Odysseus' retelling of them. Odysseus, King of Ithaca (also known as Ulysses in Latin), is considered the hero of this story. He angered Poseidon, God of the Sea, who doomed him to a treacherous 10-year journey home after the end of the Trojan War.

The story opens with Penelope and Telemachus, the wife and son of Odysseus, respectively. Both have been eagerly awaiting the return of Odysseus, hoping that he's still alive. Meanwhile, they are forced to stave off over a hundred power-hungry suitors of Penelope. Then, we meet the hero Odysseus after he is released from captivity by Calypso. He soon becomes shipwrecked and washes up on the land of the Phaeacians. Odysseus tells the Phaeacians of the long and challenging journey he and his crew encountered as they made their way home, including fighting the Cyclops, escaping the Sirens, encountering the Lotus-eaters, braving threatening storms, and meeting the powerful sorceress Circe. In the second half of the epic poem, Odysseus and Telemachus reunite, and they successfully work together to rid the suitors from their home. When Odysseus is finally reunited with Penelope after ten years at war and ten more getting home, Penelope is at first hesitant to believe she's looking at her husband. However, Odysseus proves his identity by reminding her of how he made their bed from an olive tree that is still rooted into the ground, illustrating that their wedding bed is unshakable, both literally and metaphorically. The couple realize that they are kindred spirits that will, at last, spend the remainder of their lives together in harmony.

*The Odyssey* is taught in schools across the globe, has been translated into over 70 languages, and is one of the most recognized pieces of literature of all time.

# EPIC INSPIRATIONS

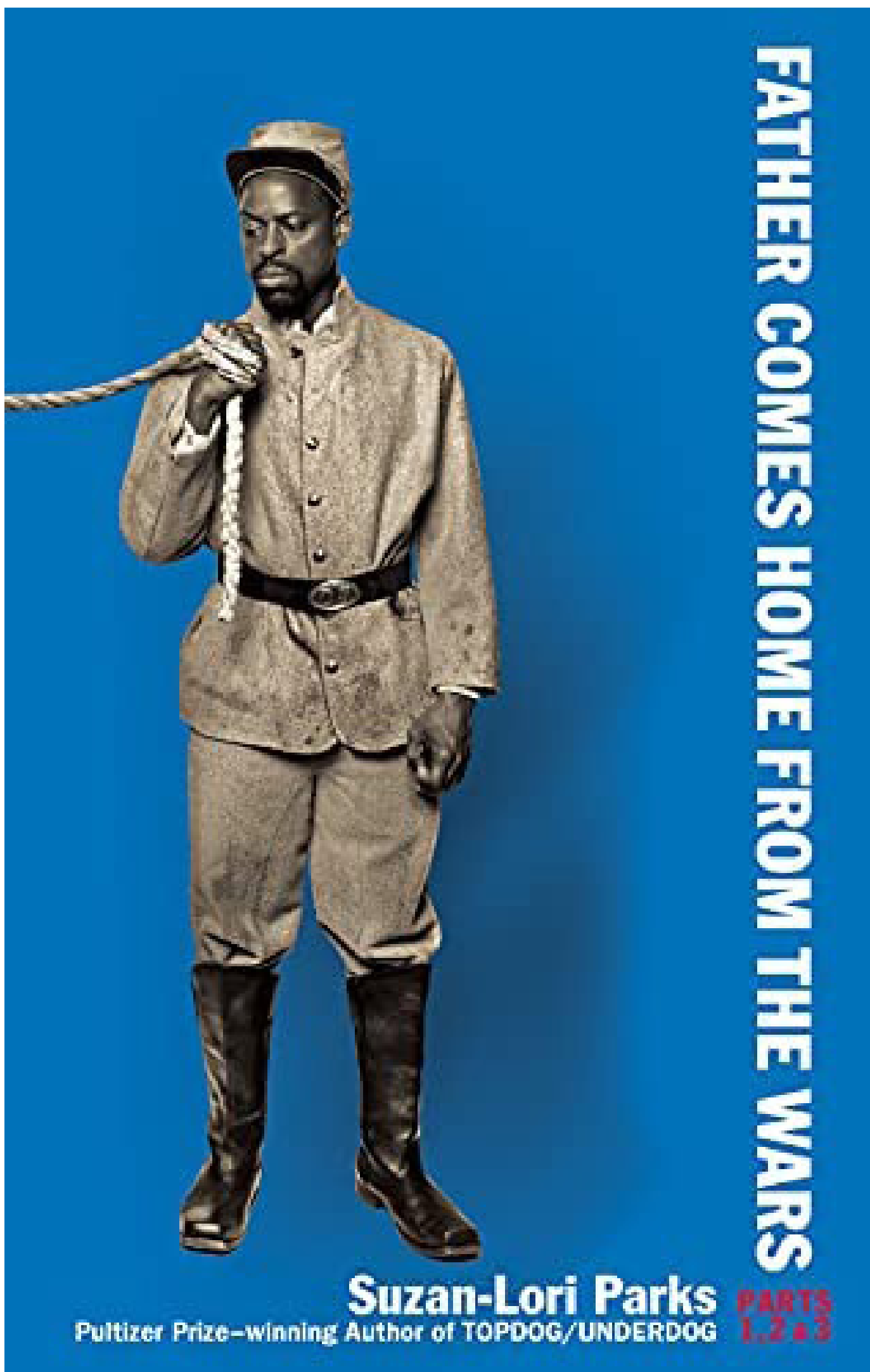
As you watch *black odyssey*, you may notice some familiar themes. Homer's *The Odyssey* has fascinated readers for over 2,000 years, so it's not surprising that artists of the past and present have been inspired to create their own takes on one of the most famous tales ever written. Below, you'll find stories that, like *black odyssey*, take on Homer's epic through their own particular lens. It's extraordinary to examine how influential one poem has been on Western culture.



## ***THE GOLDEN APPLE***

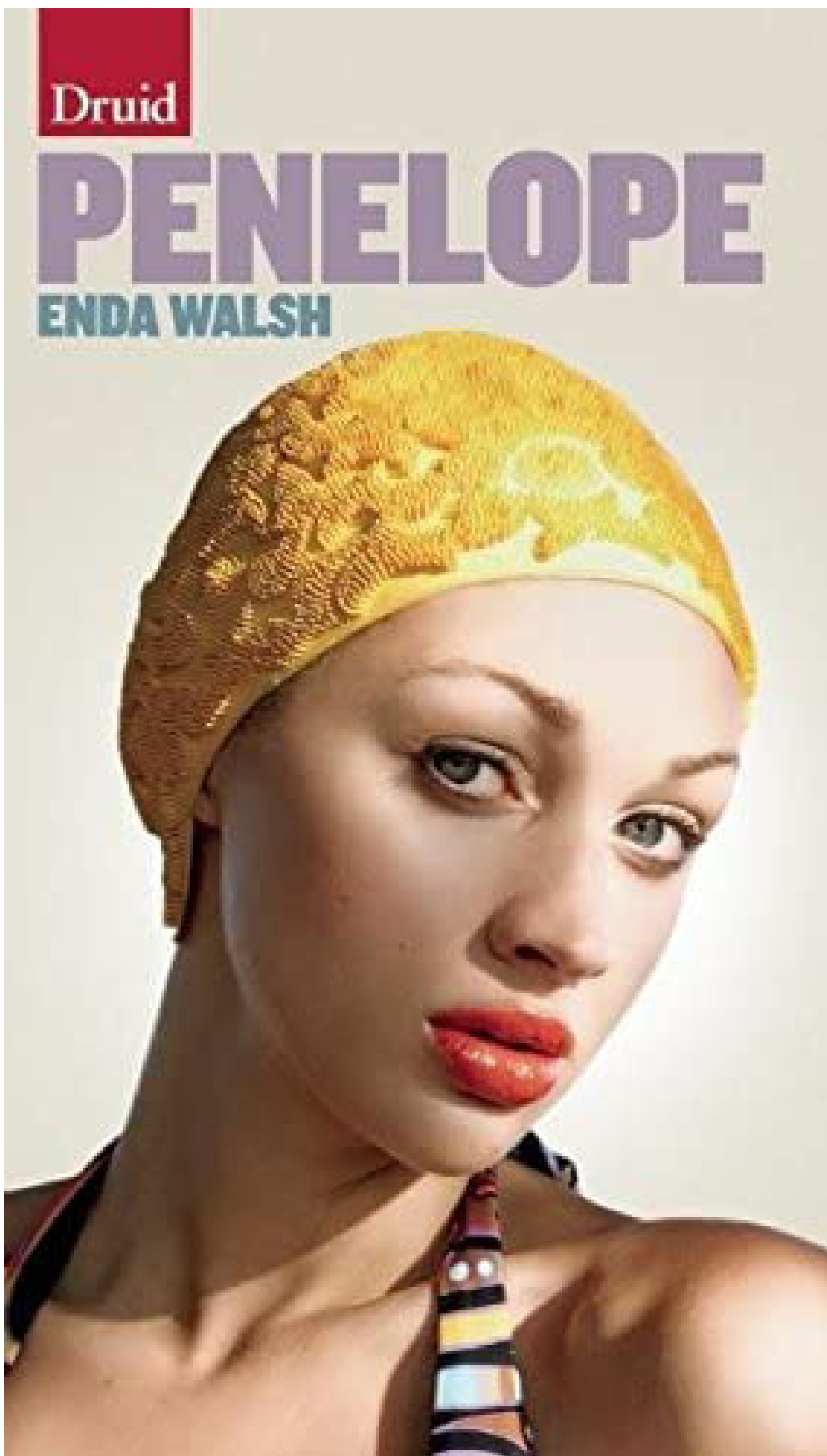
A 1954 Broadway musical, *The Golden Apple* was adapted from both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and set in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. The musical comedy is a 1950's American satire in what is both a celebration and criticism of an idealized America. Lyricist and book writer John Latouche described his work as "no adaptation of Homeric grandeurs, but a comic reflection of classical influence on the way we think nowadays."





## ***FATHER COMES HOME FROM THE WARS***

A play by Suzan-Lori Parks, *Father Comes Home From the Wars* is a retelling of *The Odyssey* told from the perspective of an enslaved man, Hero, during the Civil War. Offered freedom if he joins in the fight to save the Confederacy, Hero must choose whether to leave behind the woman he loves and risk the likelihood of another empty promise made by his master, or remain unfree forever.



## ***PENELOPE***

*Penelope*, a play written by Enda Walsh, reimagines *The Odyssey* from the point of view of suitors fighting for the hand of Penelope, wife of Odysseus. The suitors perform elaborate courtships as they dream of the day Odysseus returns home so they might finally fight him to the death and win Penelope's hand in marriage.





## ***COLD MOUNTAIN***

Charles Frazier's 1997 novel, *Cold Mountain*, retells *The Odyssey* set in the Civil War era. It follows the point of view of Imman, a Confederate soldier who leaves the battlefield to return to his wife Ada, who has been fighting to keep their home afloat while her husband is away. This love story illustrates the toll war takes on American families. The novel was adapted into a film in 2003 that stars Jude Law, Nicole Kidman, and Renée Zellweger.



# ULYSSES



James  
Joyce

## **ULYSSES**

James Joyce, an Irish novelist, had his novel, *Ulysses*, published in 1920. Joyce uses the format of Homer's epic poem to tell an "everyday man" version of the epic tale. Rather than a 10-year voyage, the protagonist, Leopold Bloom, makes his journey home over the period of a single day in Dublin, Ireland. Joyce uses colorful parallels like a "wine dark sea" in *The Odyssey* that becomes "snot green" and the monster Cyclops now embodied by a large bigoted drunk.

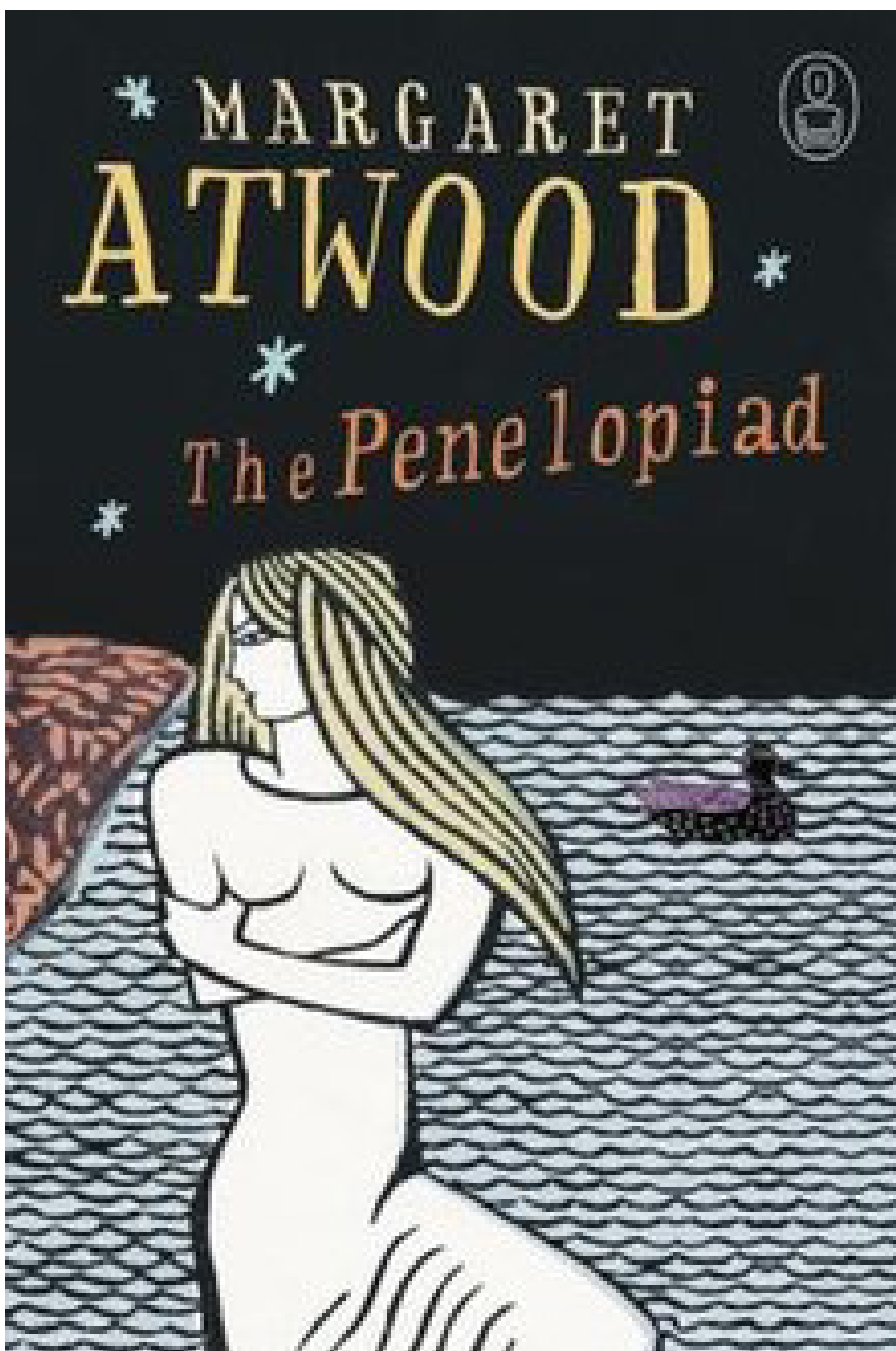




## ***BIG FISH: A NOVEL OF MYTHIC PROPORTIONS***

The 1998 novel *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* by Daniel Wallace adapts *The Odyssey* to the American South. Edward Bloom, a direct reference to Leopold Bloom of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, tells the story of his life using metaphorical tales in order to teach his son, William, meaningful moral lessons. Edward presents himself as a hero who faces challenging roadblocks and adversaries. It was later made into a film with a star-studded cast, including Helena Bonham Carter, Ewan McGregor, Albert Finney, Jessica Lange, and Danny DeVito.



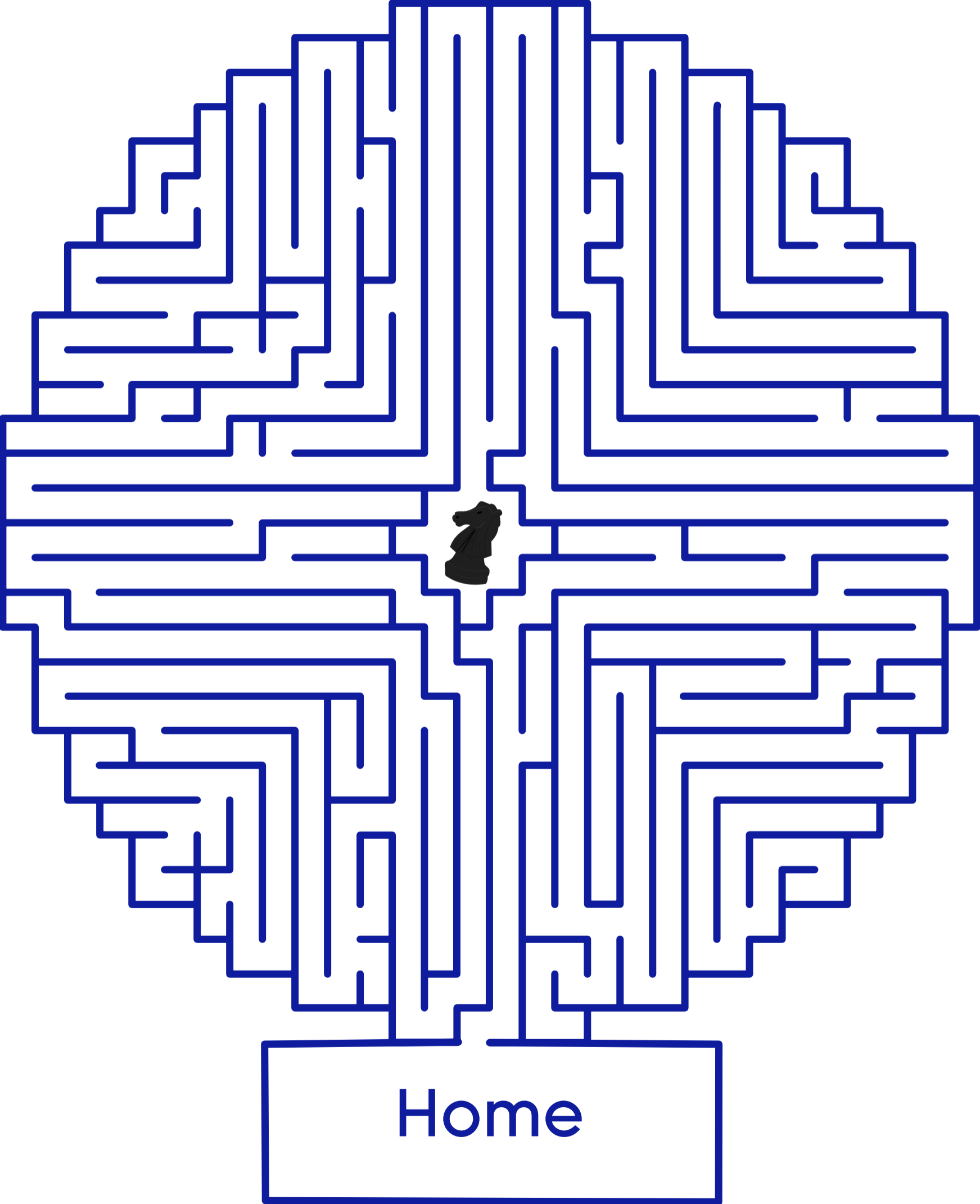


## ***THE PENELOPIAD***

Margaret Atwood's novel was published in 2005. In *The Penelopiad*, Penelope, wife of Odysseus, reflects on the events that took place in *The Odyssey*. This adaptation is told entirely from Penelope's point of view, with the twelve maids killed by Penelope's son, Telemachus, playing a critical role in the story. In the foreword of her novel, Atwood wrote, "I've always been haunted by the hanged maids and, in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself."

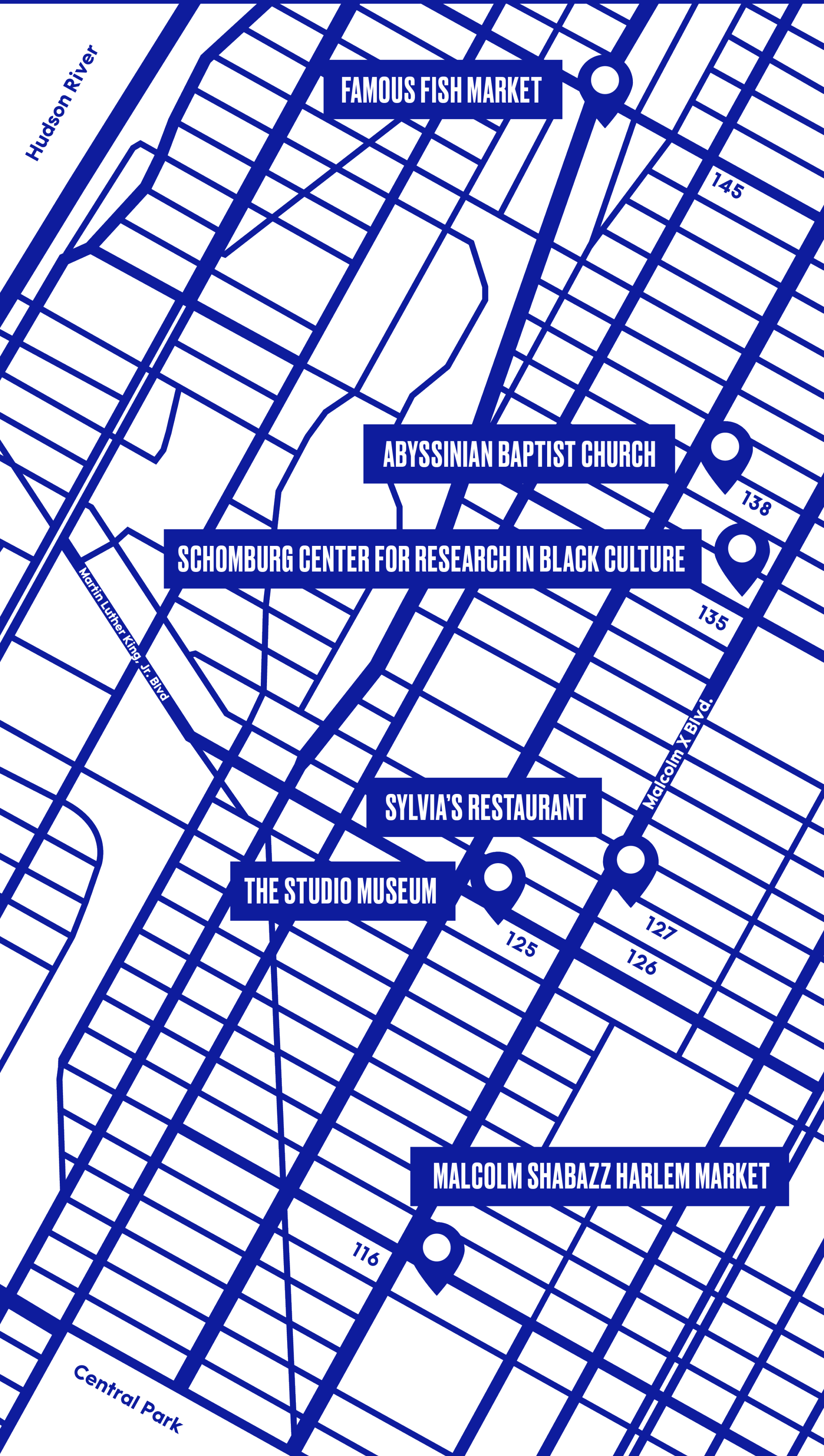


Help Ulysses get home.



# HARLEM AND *black odyssey*

Playwright Marcus Gardley wrote *black odyssey* in and about Harlem. Enjoy this map to reference the locations mentioned in the play or treat yourself to a self-guided walking tour to experience the world of the show firsthand.



## FAMOUS FISH MARKET

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

Owned by the same family for almost 50 years, patrons often wait in long lines at this popular restaurant for fresh seafood options and delicious french fries.

## ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH

[abyssinian.org](http://abyssinian.org)

Established in the early 1800s, Abyssinian Baptist Church is one of the oldest African-American Baptist churches in the United States and the very first in New York.

## SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is a world-renowned cultural research library within the New York Public Library institution that focuses on the preservation of research and materials related to African American experiences and the African diaspora.

## SYLVIA'S RESTAURANT

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

Known as "The Queen of Soul Food," Sylvia's was founded by Sylvia Woods in 1962. Authentic soul food has been served for over 55 years at this legendary Harlem icon.

## THE STUDIO MUSEUM

The Studio Museum promotes artists of African descent and artwork that has been inspired and influenced by Black culture. The museum opened in 1968 and was founded by Harlem residents, activists, and philanthropists.

## MALCOLM SHABAZZ HARLEM MARKET

This indoor and outdoor canopied marketplace showcases many vendors offering beautiful goods including African crafts, clothing, jewelry, and other accessories.



# Q&A

## A CONVERSATION WITH MARCUS GARDLEY & STEVIE WALKER-WEBB

*black odyssey* is an extraordinary reimagining of Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*. CSC's Producing Artistic Associate, Zuhdi Boueri, interviewed playwright Marcus Gardley and director Stevie Walker-Webb about their process, vision, and inspiration for this production.



playwright Marcus Gardley

**ZUHDI BOUERI:** What inspired you to tell the story of *The Odyssey* through this particular lens? How did you come to this idea, and how do you think it will resonate for audiences in 2023?

**MARCUS GARDLEY:** The impetus for this play came from a conversation I was having with my younger sister, who is adopted. She was struggling with the fact that she didn't know her biological family at the time, and my heart was breaking because I didn't know how to help her with her situation. So, I decided to write a play that I hoped would give everyone who watched the wisdom to know that not all family is blood-related and that in a lot of ways, we are all connected by history and even more profoundly by story. The central character in this play doesn't know his biological family, and one of the big revelations is that they have never left him. Even though they may not be in the physical world, they are with him – to guide him.



**ZB:** You've reset the play to take place in Harlem for this production. Can you talk about that choice and how that will make this New York premiere different from earlier versions?

**MG:** When I originally wrote the play, I was living in Harlem. So, this particular script is actually, in a lot of ways, a journey back to the original. I had always intended for the play to take place in Harlem. So, this feels like a homecoming, and I love the idea that the play started in Harlem, has been produced all over the country, and is now coming back to where it started.

**ZB:** What brings you back to classic stories for inspiration? Where else do you find creative spark?

**MG:** I think it's important to retell stories that speak to the human condition. It's also important to borrow from the life-lessons that are in ancient texts. I'm always amazed at how classical stories resonate in the present-day. This is what makes a story a classic – it is as relevant for its time as it is to ours. But I also think that it's important to not only examine or analyze those classical texts but to also put them in a contemporary lens. In this way, we are asking ourselves: what have we learned from the lessons of the past? I've found that most of my creative spark comes from public transportation. It's no surprise that it looms large in the play. Buses, subway cars, planes, airports, trains, and train stations allow you to hear the natural language of the people around you. There's also something fascinating about how people present themselves when they are traveling; the stories they tell about where they come from and where they're going. It gives one a sense of the American story. Most people in this country have come from another place, whether it be personally or ancestrally – and even those whose origins began here have stories about migration, gentrification, and finding home in the most unexpected places.





director [Stevie Walker-Webb](#)

**ZB:** What do you think *black odyssey* is about? What do you want audiences to be thinking about after seeing the show?

**STEVIE WALKER-WEBB:** August Wilson used to say, “there is no idea in the world that isn’t contained by Black life.” In this, he’s not only pointing to the immensity and richness of the Black experience, but he’s also pointing to its universality. We have been conditioned to see Greek stories as universal and readily accessible to everyone no matter their color or cultural background. We’ve been taught to identify with the humanity of those mythical characters and to admire their triumphs over insurmountable circumstances. This same kind of admiration is not always given to the Black experience in America. Marcus Gardley, however, uses these mythical stories we all know to draw parallels to the Black experience in America. I hope that audiences will enjoy themselves, laugh, cry, turn up in their seats, and at the same time go to church with us. More than anything, I want the audience to see themselves in these characters and thereby understand just how difficult it is to be Black in this country... and at the same time see how we are all Ulysses – no matter our color, we are all doing whatever we can to make it home, whether that is a physical place that we are fighting to afford in an ever-inflating economy or a metaphysical home that we find when we are in the company of our chosen family. We are more connected than disconnected, fellow sojourners even. At the end of the day, there is only one path, and we’re all on it together.

**ZB:** How did you first connect with *black odyssey*? Did you know Marcus's work before? Why did you want to direct it?

**SWW:** The first time I experienced Marcus's work I was sitting in Chicago in a production of his (then new play) *The House That Will Not Stand*. I remember sitting in the audience stunned into stillness. I didn't applaud when the cast came out, and an usher had to invite me to leave the theater. The lyrical piercing power of his pen left me in a kind of post-coital paralysis. Now I get this rare and incredibly special opportunity to bring his characters to life and to bring my vision to an already visionary and exquisite piece of text. When [former CSC Artistic Director] John Doyle asked me if I wanted to direct *black odyssey*, I couldn't say YES fast enough.

**ZB:** Have you had any particular influences or mentors along the way?

**SWW:** Everything influences me. I try to move about the world with both palms open, ready to give as quickly as I receive. The artists and writers who have made the biggest impact on me: Octavia E. Butler, Toni Morrison, MY GAWD MAYA ANGELOU, Zora Neale Hurston, Lorraine Hansberry, Spike Lee, and Shirley Caesar...I've always wanted to be able to direct a play the way she sings a song. Her voice has the sensual power of the blues but also the righteousness of God. She is the greatest storyteller I've ever known. Sometimes I ask myself, "how would Shirley Caesar tell this story?", which normally will get me to where I'm trying to go. Oskar Eustis has always been a friend and real guide in the maze of the New York theater scene, but truly Black Women have been the greatest mentors I've ever had. My grandmothers, my mother, all four of my sisters...and pretty much every Black woman I know. I am the fortunate recipient of the friendship and investment of so many ingenious Black women.



# EDUCATION SECTION

## FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

This section was developed with Mikhail Collins, the 2022 NYC Summer Youth Employment Program Education Assistant, to help students and teachers prepare to see *black odyssey*. Feel free to share this section with your students.



# SUMMARY

Marcus Gardley's *black odyssey* is the story of Ulysses, a Black man who enlisted in the U.S. Navy during peacetime in order to provide for his family but was sent overseas after 9/11. We follow his journey as he tries to find his way back to his wife and son.

# CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

## ANCESTORS

### Deus

Immortal. The most dignified god, Deus duels his brother Paw Sidin in a chess battle to decide the fate of Ulysses. Deus is capable of assuming many forms, and he does, including Eaton (a chef) and Super Fly Tireseas (a blind Cadillac driver and shagadelic prophet).



### Paw Sidin

Immortal. The brother of Deus and god of the ocean, Paw Sidin seeks the life of Ulysses for the killing of his son. To win vengeance, he plays chess against Deus (and the chess pieces are people). Like his brother, he can disguise himself as others, and he does, as a Naval Officer, John Suitor, and Officer 1.



### Aunt Tee

Immortal. Wise with a side of arrogance, Aunt Tina brings the goddess of wisdom down to a human level. (The same actress will play Scylla, sea creature, and Calypso.)



## MORTALS

### Ulysses Lincoln

Ulysses, the protagonist, deals with PTSD. He must explore his own past, which will eventually link him with his ancestors and tease apart what was done to him versus what he himself has done.



### Nella P. Lincoln

This woman might be what every man dreams of settling down with. She was told that her husband was dead at sea, but she never gave up hope that one day he would eventually find his way back home like he promised.



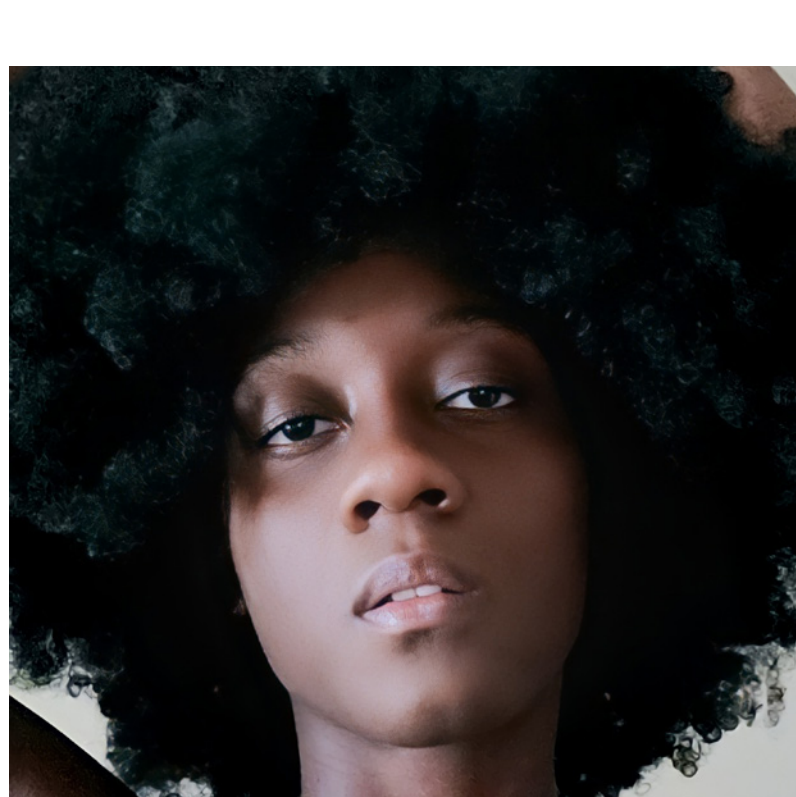
### Malachai Lincoln

Fiercely smart and rebellious, Malachai's life is missing one crucial piece: a father figure to guide him. He also struggles with being a young Black man in America.



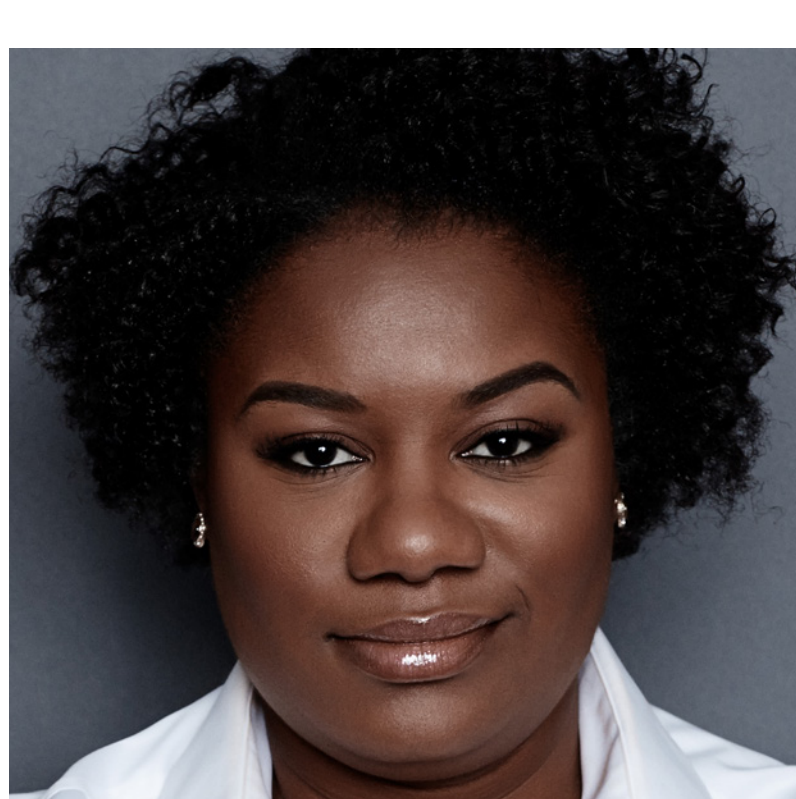
### Benevolence

A young Black girl stuck with her family on a roof in the South in the 1960s trying to survive an endless flood.



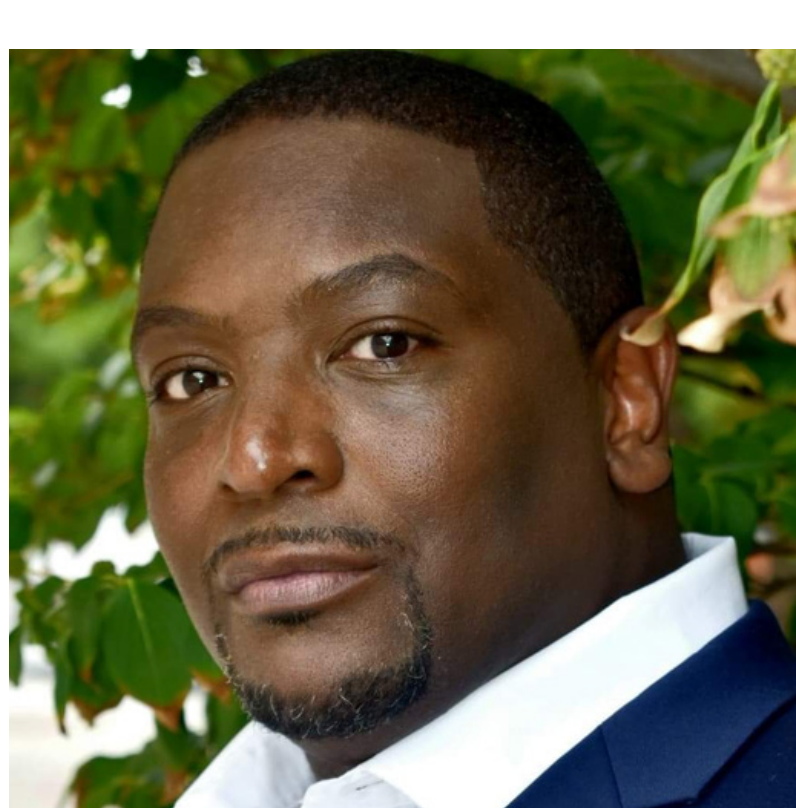
### Alsendra Sabine

Mother to Benevolence, wife to Artez. (The same actress will play Circe, the conductor, and Carib'diss, sea creature.)



### Artez Sabine

Grand Marshall of a second line, husband to Alsendra, father to Benevolence. (The same actor will also play Alabama Slim, The Soul Siren, The Alter Ego, and Officer 2.)





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## PARTNER EXERCISE: THEMES

**Racial injustice**

**Racial inequality**

**Self-discovery**

**Cultural influences**

**Moral obligation**

**Black identity**

*black odyssey* deals with many themes. Choose one from the list above or identify your own, then talk with a partner about how that theme is revealed over the course of the play. How does this theme impact the characters?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

**Did Ulysses come back better or worse?**

**Was leaving home a good choice?**

**How do things happening today in society affect you personally?**

**How do you define yourself?  
What influences that?**

# SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

The Ancestors of an unknown soldier lost at sea take the stage to tell his story and bring him home.

After killing Poly'famous (son of Paw Sidin, god of the sea) Ulysses falls overboard and is lost at sea. His wife Nella, pregnant with their first child, waits faithfully for him to return. Hungry for revenge, Paw Sidin shows up at Nella's doorstep with mischief on his mind. Disguised as a Naval Officer, he breaks the news of Ulysses' disappearance and tries to charm Nella into infidelity. Nella refuses Paw Sidin's advances; without proof, she can't be sure her husband is not still alive. She decides to wait for Ulysses to return, whenever that may be.

"Black people have experienced so much in this country that we kinda live on a metaphorical plane. At once, it's real flesh, it's real blood, the things that we've lost and we've sacrificed in this country, they are very real. But at the same time, sometimes to cope with it and to deal with it, we have to approach it from a metaphorical standpoint, and one might even say a deeply spiritual standpoint. And so, what Marcus has done, he's just taken our kind of epic historical struggle and deconstructed it in this way that it makes the metaphorical all that much more palpable."

- Stevie Walker-Webb

Athena, Ulysses' aunt, heads to Harlem to look after Nella. Her father Deus, king of the gods, is against this, because to live as a mortal carries great risk, and he doesn't want his daughter to grow old and die. Athena is determined, however, and she soon shows up at Nella's door as "Aunt Tina." Nella is skeptical at first, because she and Ulysses met when they were just 13 years old; as far as she knew, Ulysses had no living family. Aunt Tina, however, looks like Ulysses and knows things only kin could know, so Nella accepts her help, and together they raise Nella and Ulysses' son, Malachai.

Far away, Ulysses floats on a raft, lost in time and space. He meets a Black family stranded on a rooftop after a flood. Ulysses befriends their daughter, Benevolence, and tells her his story – how he was thrown overboard by Paw Sidin, rescued by the enchanting conductor Circe, and how Circe tried to trap him with the finest food known to man – but her chef, Eaton, helped Ulysses escape. When the floodwaters rise dangerously, Ulysses must stop telling stories so that he and Benevolence can swim to safety.



Back in Harlem, 16 years have passed. Aunt Tina has aged considerably, having spent such a long time down on earth, and Malachai is now a brilliant student at a prestigious Upper West Side Ivy Preparatory School. Even with Aunt Tina's help, Nella struggles as a single mother. When Malachai attends a protest, he is arrested.

Benevolence asks Ulysses to continue his story, and he tells her how, after leaving Circe's lair, he wound up on the Southern tip of Africa, crossed the equator with the help of a shagadelic blind man in a Cadillac, and experienced the pain of his ancestors in a slave castle.

Meanwhile, in Harlem, Paw Sidin pursues Nella again, this time as John Suitor. Aunt Tina sees through his disguise, but neither she nor Malachai can dissuade Nella from marrying him, because Nella believes it is the only way she can give her son what he needs: a father.

**"I like big stories. They are attractive to me because they detail many points of view. They are more indicative of our world."**

**- Marcus Gardley**

Benevolence encourages Ulysses to tell her what happened after he escaped the slave castle. Reluctantly, he reveals that he came face to face with his Alter Ego, a Black soldier from the Civil War. His Alter Ego forced him to confront what he did overseas – and the fact that he killed Poly'famous, an innocent child, out of fear. After facing his actions, Ulysses meets Big Maw/Calypso, his great-grandmother, who tends to him and gives him family love that he has never known. Benevolence, it is revealed, has her own special connection to Ulysses: a child of the 1960s, she grew up to be his mother before dying in childbirth.

Ulysses' and Malachai's stories intertwine more closely with each passing moment until both men are stopped by police. A confrontation between Malachai and an armed officer nearly ends in tragedy, but Ulysses bargains, offering Paw Sidin his own life instead. Aunt Tina and Deus' protection is too strong, however, and Paw Sidin cannot kill Ulysses. In jail, Ulysses and Malachai finally meet. When Nella arrives to bail out her son, she is overjoyed to see her husband and reunite with him after 16 years.

# FOUNDATIONS

From the Yoruba religion to the stars of Motown, *black odyssey* invokes the people, melodies, and experiences of Black people in America.

Originating in Southwestern Nigeria, **Yoruba** is one of the ten most widely practiced religions in the world. Brought to the Americas and the Caribbean by enslaved Africans during the period of chattel slavery, it is the basis of many belief systems still practiced today, including Santería, Umbanda, Trinidad Orisha, and Candomblé. In Yoruba, dance, music, sacred texts, herbalism, and more honor and strengthen connections between the people and guiding spirits, or òrìsà.

“Music is the heartbeat of this show.”

- Marcus Gardley



16th Street Baptist Church courtesy of U.S. Library of Congress

In deeply segregated Birmingham, Alabama, The **16th Street Baptist Church** is the first and oldest Black church in Birmingham and a known gathering place for civil rights activists. On September 15, 1963, four members of the white supremacist terrorist group the Ku Klux Klan bombed the church, injuring nearly two dozen people and killing four young girls: Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, and Denise McNair.

Ulysses sees the four little girls huddled together on a nearby rooftop, waiting for justice.



From 1910 to 1970, six million Black Americans left the Jim Crow South and moved to Northern, Midwestern, and Western states in what was known as **The Great Migration**. Pre-WWII saw a focus on Northern and Midwestern cities, including New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Pittsburgh; post-WWII saw more people move to Western cities, including Oakland, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland (OR), and Seattle.



'Black Youngsters Outside the Stateway Gardens Highrise Housing Project on Chicago's Southside,' c/o John H. White/National Archives

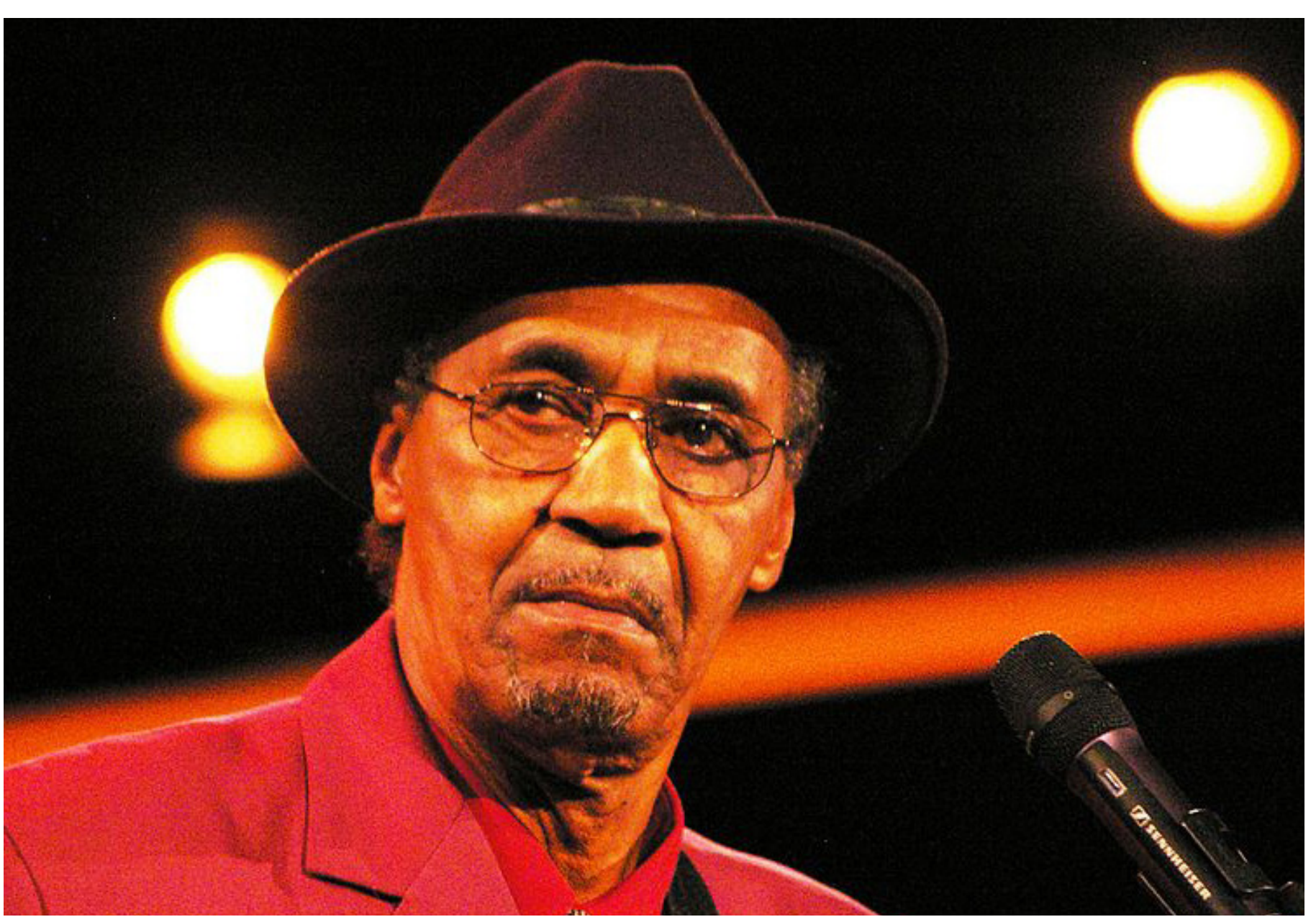
From the 16th to the 19th century, approximately 12 million Africans were kidnapped and transported on a brutal, 80-day forced voyage known as **The Middle Passage**. The Middle Passage was part of the triangular transatlantic slave trade, in which goods and enslaved human beings were shipped from Europe to Africa to the Americas and back to Europe. It is estimated that between 10% and 15% of passengers were killed or died due to the abusive, unsanitary, and dangerous conditions; their bodies were thrown overboard.



The Million Man March, photo by Yoke Mc / Joacim Osterstam

On October 16, 1995, hundreds of thousands of Black men gathered on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. to "convey to the world a vastly different picture of the Black male" and draw attention to issues faced by Black Americans. This was known as **The Million Man March**.





Alabama Slim

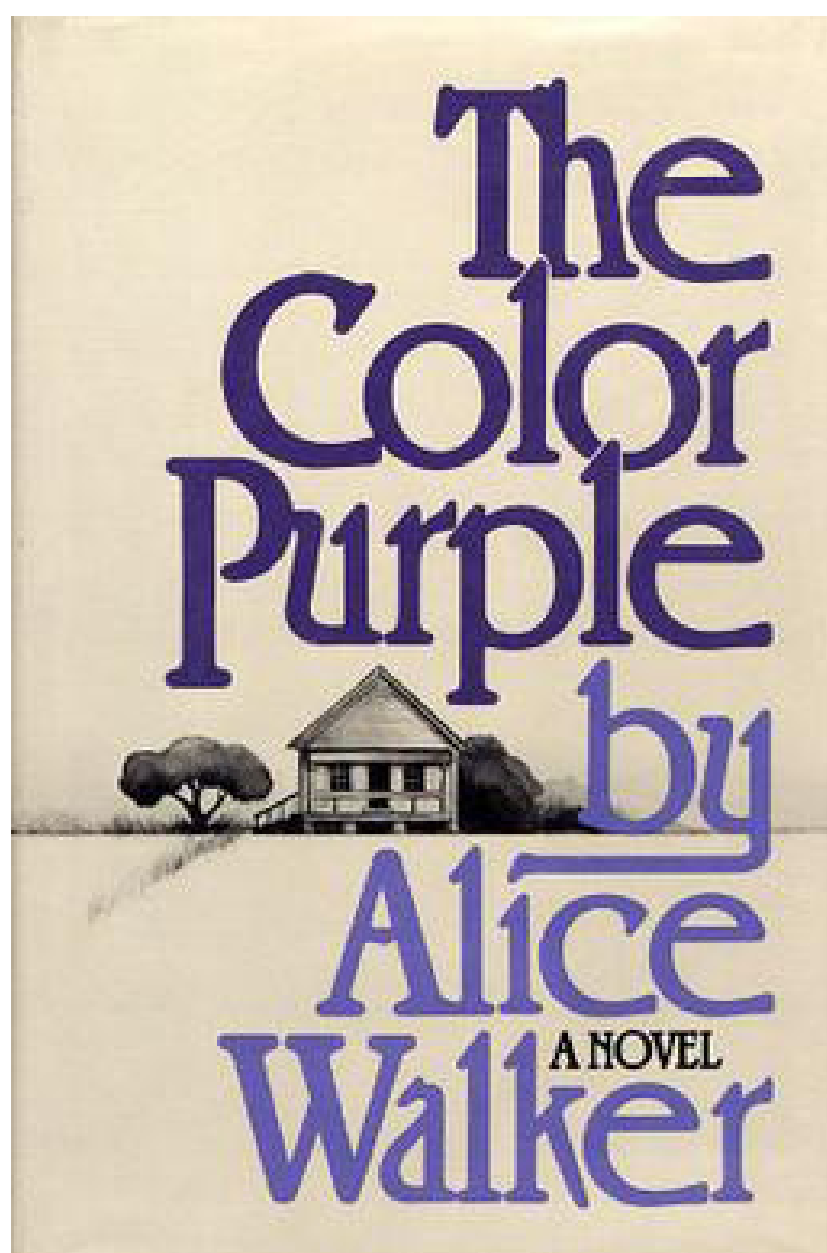
**Alabama Slim** (b. 1939) Guitarist, songwriter, and New Orleans Blues musician Alabama Slim learned to sing in the fields with his sharecropper parents and grandparents. Start with *The Mighty Flood*, then check out his latest album, *The Parlor*. Ulysses meets Alabama Slim after he is rescued by Circe.



James Brown with a Lincoln Mark III

**James Brown** (b. 1933, d. 2006) Father of funk, godfather of soul, and Hardest Working Man in Show Business James Brown was born in the impoverished town of Elko, South Carolina. Some of James Brown's many genre-defining hits include "I Got You (I Feel Good)," "Please, Please, Please," and "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag."

Soul Siren tempts Ulysses by singing James Brown's "Out of Sight."



The Color Purple 1st edition cover, designed by Judith Kazdym Leeds

An epistolary novel written by Alice Walker and published in 1982, *The Color Purple* tells the story of Celie, a poor young Black woman who overcomes extreme abuse before eventually finding love and family. The first novel written by a Black woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize, it went on to become an Oscar-nominated film and a Tony Award-winning Broadway musical. (Marcus Gardley, *black odyssey's* playwright, has written the screenplay for the new film adaptation of the musical, which is slated to open in December 2023.)





Diana Ross, courtesy of Motown Records

**Diana Ross** (b. 1944) Born in Detroit, Michigan, aka Motor City, aka the birthplace of Motown, Diana Ross was the lead singer of Motown's #1 band The Supremes before becoming a chart-topping soloist. Her greatest hits include "Baby Love," "I'm Coming Out," and "Theme From Mahogany (Do You Know Where You're Going To)."

Carib'diss is a sultry siren who tempts Ulysses by singing "Come See About Me" by The Supremes.



The Four Tops

Another great Motown band, **The Four Tops'** top hits include "I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie Honey Bunch)." Listen to "Still Waters Run Deep," co-written with the legendary Motown songwriter and record producer Smokey Robinson.



A second-line parade

**The Grand Marshall of a Second Line** is a respected member of the community who leads parades with flashy clothes and fancy footwork. Sometimes a second line will follow a funeral or serve as a general memorial for those who have passed since the last parade. Artez Sabine is Grand Marshall of a second line.





Zora Neale Hurston, courtesy of U.S. Library of Congress

**Zora Neale Hurston** (b. 1891, d. 1960) Anthropologist, author, and filmmaker Zora Neale Hurston's work centered African-American and Caribbean folklore, racial problems in the American South at the turn of the 20th century, the challenges faced by Black women, and more. Born in Notasulga, Alabama, she was the first Black graduate of Barnard College and a key figure of the Harlem Renaissance. You may have read her brilliant novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Make sure you also check out *Dust Tracks on a Road*; *Moses, Man of the Mountain*; and the posthumously-published *You Don't Know Us Negroes*.



Tina Turner, courtesy of Al Kaplan/Jay Bernstein Public Relations, Los Angeles

**Tina Turner** (b. 1939) Tina Turner, Queen of Rock N' Roll, was born Anna Mae Bullock in Nutbush, Tennessee. She rose to fame as one half of the Ike and Tina Turner Revue but left Ike and his abuse to become a major solo artist. Her life is chronicled in *Tina - The Tina Turner Musical*. Listen to "What's Love Got To Do With It" and "Proud Mary."

Scylla, a powerful siren who tempts Ulysses, tries to seduce Ulysses with Tina Turner's "Fool for Love."

"There is pain and resilience in roots music. These songs helped people survive. The will and the strength to face adversity are embedded into these songs."

- Marcus Gardley



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