

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

Artist: Philip Kan Gotanda  
Discipline: Theatre

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Playwright Philip Kan Gotanda and A.C.T.'s Carey Perloff hard at work on Gotanda's play "After the War." Still image from the Spark story, 2007.

## SECTION I - OVERVIEW

### SUBJECT

Language Arts, History, Arts

### GRADE RANGES

6-12

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Theater, English, History,  
Language Arts, Social Studies

### OBJECTIVE

To introduce educators to the A.C.T. Theater's production of celebrated playwright Philip Kan Gotanda's new work, *After the War*, which captures the vibrance of the Asian-American theater aesthetic.

### STORY SYNOPSIS

Philip Kan Gotanda's play *After the War* tells the story of the post-WWII relationship between the Japanese American community and the African American community in San Francisco's Japantown. The play describes the conflicts between Japanese Americans and African Americans at the end of World War II, when Japanese Americans returned home from internment camps. Spark goes behind the scenes to learn about Gotanda, and how he brings this unique time in our country's history to the stage.

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Hands-on group projects, in which students assist and support one another  
Hands-on individual projects, in which students work independently  
Group oral discussion and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing  
Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance

### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

Illustrate how diverse art forms have an impact on the expression of ideas.  
Foster an understanding of the elements of playwriting.  
Analyze how authors create and develop characters.

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story on Philip Kan Gotanda on DVD or VHS and related equipment  
Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers  
Pencils, pens, and paper  
Arts Expression Survey

### INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Interpersonal- awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations  
Intrapersonal- awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations  
Visual-Spatial-the ability to manipulate and create mental images to solve problems



See more information on  
Multiple Intelligences at  
[www.kqed.org/spark/education](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education).

### MEDIA MATTERS

The following SPARK stories may be used for compare/contrast purposes:

Traveling Jewish Theater  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/places/spark/profile.jsp?id=4939>

Teatro Visión  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/places/spark/profile.jsp?id=4924>

## SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

### CONTENT OVERVIEW

Philip Kan Gotanda, one of our nation's leading playwrights, has created an extensive body of work about the Asian American experience. Stories of identity, race, conflict, pain, joy and love resonate through his work. Spark visits with Gotanda at the American Conservatory Theater, where his play "After the War" is being staged.

Commissioned by A.C.T., "After the War" is set post-World War II in a boarding house in San Francisco's Japantown. The diverse cast of characters, including Japanese Americans, African Americans, poor whites and a Russian Jew, portray, from their very different points of view, the interracial conflicts that arose out of the Japanese American internment.

In his work, Gotanda, whose parents were sent to an internment camp in 1942, tells the particulars of his own life experiences, his struggle with identity and the history of Japanese American society. He says, "You should write because you have something to say."

In his late teens, Gotanda traveled to Japan, looking for a place where he could find "racial anonymity." Instead, he was regarded not as Japanese, but as a sansei, a third-generation Japanese American. Gotanda returned to the United States, graduated from the University of California at Santa Barbara and earned a law degree from Hastings College of Law. While working at the North Beach-Chinatown Legal Aid Society in San Francisco, he wrote his first play, a musical entitled "The Avocado Kid, or Zen in the Art of Guacamole," based on a classic Japanese children's tale. Though Gotanda did not have many contacts in the theatre community, the Los Angeles-based theatre group, East/West Players wanted to produce his play and helped to get his theatre career rolling. Pioneer Asian American actor, Maku was the artistic director of East/West players at the time. Interesting to note is the fact that Maku's

granddaughter, Sala Iwamatsu, plays the character of Lillian in Gotanda's "After the War".

Gotanda has also worked with the Asian American Theater Company, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Campo Santo, the East West Players, the Manhattan Theatre Club, the Mark Taper Forum, the New York

Shakespeare Festival and the San Jose Repertory Theatre, among many others. He is also a noted filmmaker whose works include "The Kiss," "Drinking Tea" and "Life Tastes Good."

### THE BIG PICTURE

WWII was a time of great turmoil for Japanese Americans. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, and the United States entered World War II, the United States government claimed that all people of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast of the country were considered a risk to national security. The country was overwhelmed with war hysteria. President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, and as a result, over 120,000 Japanese Americans were evacuated from their homes in California, Arizona, Oregon, and Washington and were forced into internment camps. The government decided to imprison people without evidence or trials, and the Japanese Americans were denied their constitutional rights because of their ancestry. More than two-thirds of those interned under the Executive Order were citizens of the United States, and none had ever shown any disloyalty, yet they were forced to live in terrible conditions, surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. The ten camps were located in remote and desolate areas, and the climate was harsh. The Japanese Americans lived in temporary housing for much of the spring and summer of 1942 until permanent camps were built. They lived in these brutal conditions until the end of the war. The last of the camps was closed in March of 1946.

When Japanese Americans returned to their San Francisco neighborhoods after the war, they found that African Americans had moved into the community from the neighboring Fillmore District. They had established themselves in businesses, and also established a vibrant jazz scene. The African Americans who returned from the war found racism still very much alive. Many workers lost their jobs when local shipyards closed down. It was difficult for the Japanese Americans as well, as they returned home after being prisoners in their own country.

This collision of cultures brought about tension and conflict, and larger questions of identity in American society. Finding one's place after the war became a central question in people's lives. They had to examine what had changed, what remained, and how they would live their lives after the war. The lives of the Japanese Americans and the African Americans were closely connected in this unique window in time.

Gotanda described his idea for *After the War* and how he reexamines history:

*"What I explore is the idea that this particular moment provided a small window where these two communities might have established some kind of bicultural community based on their commonality of postwar marginalism. With regard to this reexamination of stories of Japan, the US and World War II, I believe it has more to do with two nations revisiting their mutual histories in order to better allow for their present day alliances. Both Japan and the US are major powers whose status is declining on the world stage. The US is seen as a world power losing its dominance. Japan has dramatically being tested by other world markets. It's important that the US and Japan mend any past friction and allow for a renewed alliance to support each other in economic and military policies. They need each other. And that kind of institutional need on national levels gives rise to these types of storytelling and reexamination of history."*

<http://www.theatrebayarea.org/>

The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians was established in 1980. It called for a congressional committee to investigate the detention program and the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066. The commission held hearings and heard testimony from over 750 witnesses. They uncovered evidence from the 1940s proving that

there had been no military necessity for the unequal, unjust treatment of Japanese Americans during WWII. In 1983, the commission issued a report, *Personal Justice Denied*, and *Recommendations*.

In 1988, President Reagan signed a formal apology and paid reparations of \$20,000 to each of the 60,000 camp veterans. President Bush, in December of 2006, signed into law bill HR-1492, that will establish a new grant program to preserve the 10 camps and other sites where 120,000 Japanese Americans were confined during World War II. It designates up to \$38 million for the grant program, which the National Park Service will administer.

The reason Gotanda's play is topical today is because the struggle for identity is still critical. Many of the issues that faced our country after WWII are still a part of the fabric of our society.

## RESOURCES – TEXTS

Gotanda, Philip Kan. *Fish Head Soup and Other Plays*. University of Washington Press, 1995.

Gotanda, Philip Kan. *Ballad of Yachiyo*. Theater Communications Group, 1997.

Gotanda, Philip Kan. *No More Cherry Blossoms. Sisters Matsumoto and Other Plays*. University of Washington Press, 2005.

Gotanda, Philip Kan. *Day Standing on Its Head*. Dramatists Play Service, 1994.

Gotanda, Philip Kan. *Yankee Dawg You Die*. Dramatists Play Service, 1998.

Gotanda, Philip Kan. *The Wash*. Dramatists Play Service, 1998.

## RESOURCES – WEB SITES

Philip Kan Gotanda's Website  
[www.philipkangotanda.com](http://www.philipkangotanda.com)

Tufts University: Biography of Philip Kan Gotanda  
<http://ase.tufts.edu/asian/japanese/ajls/gotanda.html>

Asian American Theater Company  
[/www.asianamericantheater.org](http://www.asianamericantheater.org)

Asian Story Theater  
[www.asianstorytheater.com](http://www.asianstorytheater.com)

American Conservatory Theater  
<http://www.act-sfbay.org/>

Asian American Theater Company  
<http://www.asianamericantheater.org/>

## **VIDEO/AUDIO RESOURCES**

Gotanda, Philip Kan  
The Kiss Available on video.  
NAATA Distribution  
345 9th Street/2nd Fl.  
San Francisco, CA. 94103  
(415) 863-0814

Gotanda, Philip Kan  
Drinking Tea Available on video.  
NAATA Distribution  
345 9th Street/2nd Fl.  
San Francisco, CA. 94103  
(415) 863-0814

## **BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS & RESOURCES**

Annual San Francisco International Asian American  
Film Festival  
<http://www.asianamericanfilmfestival.org/>

Cal Performances  
[www.calperfs.berkeley.edu](http://www.calperfs.berkeley.edu)

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts  
<http://www.ybca.org>

Berkeley Repertory Theater  
<http://www.berkeleyrep.org/index.asp>

## DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

### **Actor**

A person, male or female, who performs a role in a play or entertainment.

### **Conflict**

The opposition of persons or forces giving rise to dramatic action in a play

### **Crisis**

A decisive point in the plot of the play on which the outcome of the remaining actions depends.

### **Characterization**

The development and portrayal of a personality through thought, action, dialogue, costuming, and makeup.

### **Character**

The personality or part an actor recreates.

### **Climax**

A decisive moment that is of maximum intensity or is a major turning point in a plot.

### **Center Stage**

The center of the acting area

### **Conflict**

Opposition between characters or forces in a work of drama or fiction, especially opposition that motivates or shapes the action of the plot.

### **Crises**

The point in a play or story at which hostile elements are most tensely opposed to each other.

### **Dialogue**

The conversation between actors on stage.

### **Director**

The person who oversees the entire process of staging a production.

### **Exposition**

Detailed information revealing the facts of a plot.

### **Internment Camps**

In 1941 (During World War II) President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which authorized removing over 120,000 Japanese Americans from their home and imprisoning them in remote areas throughout the United States.

### **Motivation**

A character's reason for doing or saying things in a play.

### **Playwright**

A person who writes plays.

### **Plot**

The author's selection and arrangement of incidents and events that shape the story line.

### **Resolution**

Finding a solution to a problem

### **Script**

The written text of a play.

### **Setting**

The scenery, properties, lights, etc., on a stage for an act or scene of a play.

### **Stage**

The area where actors perform.

### **Theme**

The author's main message

## SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

### STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

#### Building Background

Ask your students to work in small groups to research the history of Japantown in San Francisco. Have each group prepare a brief presentation sharing what it has learned with the class. You may wish to use the following Web sites as resources:

National Japanese American Historical Society

<http://www.nikkeiheritage.org/nh/nhvxiin3.html>

California Japantowns

<http://www.californiajapantowns.org/preserving.html>

#### Pair-Share Arts Survey

Help students reflect on how the arts allow one to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas in diverse ways. This activity is designed to help them respond to writing prompts, share their ideas in small groups, and participate in whole-class discussions. Give each student the following Arts Expression Survey questions:

##### *Arts Expression Survey*

How can you express your ideas through the arts?

Why do you think it is important to express ideas through the arts?

What does music allow a person to express?

What does a play allow a person to express?

What does a painting allow a person to express?

What does a dance allow a person to express?

How is a story that a playwright tells different from a book or a movie?

Describe your favorite play. What story did it tell?

After the students have completed their surveys, divide the class into pairs, and ask them to discuss their responses. Invite the class to share the results of their small-group discussion with the entire class.

#### RELATED STANDARDS

##### THEATER

Grade 6

##### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSSION

Creating, Performing, and Participating in Theater

Students apply processes and skills in acting, directing, designing, and script writing to create formal and informal theater, film/videos, and electronic media productions and to perform in them.

##### 3.0 HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXT

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of Theater

*Role and Cultural Significance of Theater*

3.1 Create scripts that reflect particular historical periods or cultures.

##### 4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

*Derivation of Meaning from Works of Theater*

4.1 Identify examples of how theater, television and film can influence or be influenced by politics and culture.

#### What a Character!

Discuss the elements of playwriting with your class, as some students may be more familiar with these concepts than others. Ask the students to share what they know about plot, character, theme, dialogue, setting, exposition, complication, conflict, crisis, climax, and resolution. You may wish to review these key terms using the vocabulary section of this guide.

Show the students the SPARK program featuring playwright Philip Kan Gotanda. After viewing this program, lead a class discussion on how Gotanda used plot, character, theme, dialogue and setting in his play. Divide the class into small groups of four or five students. Ask the students to brainstorm answers to the following questions:

- Who is your favorite literary character?
- Who is your favorite movie character?
- Who is your favorite television character?

Based on students' responses, generate a class list that focuses on how the creator of a character makes the character seem authentic. This might include

things such as dialogue, interaction with other characters, physical characteristics and attributes, and gestures. Ask each group to create a mock internet profile based on an imaginary character. Provide time for each small group to share its creation with the entire class. After the students have presented their work, ask the students to add additional items to the class list about how one is able to make a character seem authentic.

### **SPARKLER!**

You may wish to have your students view the [Densho.org](http://www.densho.org) film about the Japanese internment camps at <http://www.densho.org/about/default.asp>

### **Japantown Blog**

Help students express their understanding of issues surrounding racism, tolerance and communication through written expression. Divide the class into small groups. Ask the students to create an imaginary blog that highlights how they imagine African Americans and Japanese Americans who lived in Japantown after WWII might have engaged in dialogue with each other. Tell each group that it must contribute a minimum of eight postings to the blog, and that the postings must represent an attempt to engage in dialogue about what is occurring in daily life in their Japantown neighborhoods. Have each group present its blog to the entire class. Discuss the issues that each group focused on, and how they reflected tension and tolerance between these two groups.

### **SPARKLER!**

Brainstorm a list of reasons why characters change. Record students' ideas and post the list. Continue adding new ideas to the list as students encounter new characters.

### **Script Writing**

Ask the students to think about the meaning of identity. Lead a class discussion using the following questions as guidelines:

- What is your personal identity?
- What groups do you identify yourself with?
- What does it mean to have a national identity?

- Is it possible to have a global definition of identity?

Have the students write a brief script highlighting different aspects of identity. Tell them to use what they learned about Philip Kan Gotanda's work to guide their writing. Each script should include a plot, theme, characters, dialogue, setting, conflict and resolution.

Divide the class into six groups. Give each group its assignment below.

#### *Group One & Group Two*

Write a script that focuses on issues surrounding one's personal identity. Try to incorporate the issues that the Japanese Americans and African Americans experienced in Japantown after WWII. For example, you might write about racial tensions, compassion, anger, trust, communication or tolerance. Make sure you have a compelling story by focusing on your main message or theme.

#### *Group Three & Group Four*

Write a script that focuses on a sense of identity from a local perspective. Try to incorporate the issues that the Japanese Americans and African Americans experienced in Japantown after WWII. Make sure you have a compelling story by focusing on your main message or theme.

#### *Group Five & Group Six*

Write a script that focuses on issues of identity from a global perspective. Try to incorporate the issues that the Japanese Americans and African Americans experienced in Japantown after WWII. For example, you might write about racial tensions, compassion, anger, trust, communication or tolerance. Make sure you have a compelling story by focusing on your main message or theme.

Have each group present its skit to the entire class. If possible, invite others in the school or community to attend. Initiate a discussion based on the class skits. Ask students to share what they learned from their classmates' work.

As a final activity, construct a class graphic organizer showing the intersections of personal, local and global dimensions of identity.

You can use the interactive graphic organizer tool available here:  
[http://www.readwritethink.org/student\\_mat/student\\_material.asp?id=38](http://www.readwritethink.org/student_mat/student_material.asp?id=38).

### Using Historical & Social Context

Read the children's book "Cinder Edna" by Ellen Jackson aloud to your students. This is a modern day twist on the classic story of Cinderella. Discuss how historical and social context influences an author.

Divide the class into pairs. Give the students two tasks. First, invite them to create a list of five new titles to plays and novels that reflect different historical and social contexts. Then have them create a new ending or twist or message to a play or novel by changing the historical context.

Ask students to respond in writing journals to the following question:

Do you think that Philip Kan Gotanda's play *After the War* would have been staged immediately after WWII ended? Why or why not?

Ask students to share their responses to the journal prompt with their classmates.

### SPARKLER!

Ask your students to research the history of jazz in America. Tell them to focus on learning about race and jazz. For example, during the 1920s in Harlem, African American performers at clubs were not admitted to the places where they performed. Invite the students to think about how music can be a bridge between people of different races and ethnicities, and share their ideas with their classmates.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>.

### RELATED STANDARDS

#### THEATER

Grade 7

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

3.0 HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXTS

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

4.2 Explain how cultural influences affect the content or meaning of works of theater.

Grade 8

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

3.0 HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXTS

3.1 Describe the ways in which American history has been reflected in theater (e.g., the ways in which the Industrial Revolution and slavery were portrayed in the minstrel show, the melodrama, and the musical).

Grades 9-12 Proficient

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.1 Making acting choices, using script analysis, character research, reflection, and revision through the rehearsal process.

2.2 Write dialogues and scenes, applying basic dramatic structure: exposition, complication, conflict, crises, climax, and resolution.

#### LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 6

3.0 Literary Response and Analysis

3.2 Analyze the effect of the qualities of the character.

3.6 Identify and analyze features of themes conveyed through characters, actions, and images.

2.0 Writing Applications

2.1 Write narratives: Establish and develop a plot and setting and present a point of view that is appropriate to the stories.

Grade 7

Reading

3.0 Literary Response and Analysis

3.3 Analyze characterization as delineated through a character's thoughts, words, speech patterns, and actions; the narrator's description; and the thoughts, words, and actions of other characters.

Grade 8

Reading

3.0 Literary Response and Analysis

3.2 Evaluate the structural elements of the plot (e.g., subplots, parallel episodes, climax), the plot's development, and the way in which conflicts are (or are not) addressed and resolved.

Listening & Speaking

1.3 Organize information to achieve particular purposes by matching the message, vocabulary, voice modulation, expression, and tone to the audience and purpose.

Grades 11 & 12

Reading

3.0 Literary Response and Analysis

3.3 Analyze the ways in which irony, tone, mood, the author's style, and the "sound" of language achieve specific rhetorical or aesthetic purposes or both.

Writing

1.0 Writing Strategies

1.2 Use point of view, characterization, style (e.g., use of irony), and related elements for specific rhetorical and aesthetic purposes.