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Throughout her meteoric rise into the upper ranks of young playwrights, Lydia R. Diamond has boldly challenged assumptions about African American culture. In *Harriet Jacobs*, she turns one of the greatest of American slave narratives, Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, into a penetrating, rousing work of theater. Jacobs' book—which was published in 1861 and only partially serialized in Horace Greely's *New York Tribune* before it was deemed too graphic—chillingly exposed the sexual harassment and abuse of slave girls and women at the hands of their masters. *Harriet Jacobs: A Play* organically incorporates theatrical elements that extend the book's enormous power. Through active scenes, piercing direct address, and slave narratives, Diamond is able to give new expression to the horrors and legacies of slavery. Diamond presents African American culture in all its richness—with slavery as a part of it, but not its defining aspect. Though harrowing, *Harriet Jacobs* addresses the necessary task of reenvisioning a difficult chapter in American history.

Harriet Jacobs: A Play Details

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From Reader Review Harriet Jacobs: A Play for online ebook

QNPoohBear says

I saw the play, rather than read the script.

Harriet was a house slave on a plantation in the south in the 1830s. Her Granny was free and owned a bakery in town. Harriet is in love with a slave carpenter named Tom, who belongs to another master on another plantation. When Tom seeks out the master to purchase and marry Harriet, the master burns Tom's money and says he'll say Harriet for \$850 when "hell freezes over!" Tom disappears from Harriet's life, leaving her brokenhearted and subject to the master's advances and mistress's hatred for the rest of her life.

Unable to bear the idea of giving in to the sexual advances of her owner, Harriet makes the choice to give virtue up to a wealthy white lawyer who offers her a little bit of kindness. She bears him two children and becomes estranged from her Granny, who had made her promise to never use her body as a bargaining chip. When the master threatens to sell Harriet's children, she runs to her Granny with the babies. Granny hides Harriet a small crawl space above the rafters in a shed! The children's father buys them and places them with Granny, where Harriet watches them through a hole in the roof for seven years before finally escaping north.

Though the shed was dark, cramped, too cold or too hot, Harriet finds her voice and freedom on her own terms.

The play was incredible! There are 8 actors who play all the characters, and each actor is African-American. The white characters are differentiated by the way they dress. All the actors did a fabulous job, especially Harriet. She was bright and loved to read and dream and was faced with a lifetime of unimaginable horror, yet she maintained her dignity and determination throughout.

Maria says

On Saturday, June 9th, also my birthday, 6 classmates and I got the chance to meet a tony nominated play-write named Lydia Diamond. Lydia Diamond teaches drama at Boston University and wrote the tony nominated play titled Stick-Fly. She is the author of another phenomenal play named Harriet Jacobs, which these 6 students and I voluntarily read, discussed and connected to our lives. When we first met Ms. Diamond, she was beyond enthusiastic to meet us, she knew we were going to be there as the kids from Medford High School. She told us that the reflections and questions she read blew her away and were some of the most well thought out, well articulated, deepest and most personal things she has ever received (and she has traveled the country). We later all ran the event and all gave our opinions and discussed the book, speaking into a microphone, in front of about 80 people. Harriet Jacobs is a play loosely based off of the book Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. It is targeted toward adolescent audiences to help you try to understand the emotional abuse that slaves, primarily the women, had to face during the times of slavery. Throughout our lives and in most years of history we take, we learn about slavery. Each year, more violence and more graphics are introduced to us, desensitizing us to the fact that this actually happened. All we see are the pictures of whipped backs and people in cotton fields and are asked to try to connect to these people but we cannot because most of us don't know how it feels to be in a cotton field, and what it feels like to be whipped to near death. In no year of history do I remember us connecting to the emotional half of slavery. This play allows us to see and live Harriet's life through her perspective and to experience what she did.

Although we cannot fully understand what happened, the main purpose of this book is to try to give you the whole emotional story.

"I try to understand myself...I fear that you would incline your heads a bit to the left or the right and say 'yes, I understand, poor girl', and think no more of it. I fear that you throw your head in exasperation and say 'tell us something we have not already heard' I promise, I shall try. It is slightly beyond knowing, I live the stories and I do not yet understand"

One way we connect to this story, is through love. Harriet had a true love, his name was Tom and he was a slave on another plantation and was also denied Harriet's hand in marriage by her master who had a physical attraction to Harriet. He would try to force her into things and who knows, without her grandmother, a free woman, she may have gave in to this sexual abuse. These women had no chance to say yes or no. Another connection we have is watching our children grow up and not being able to do a thing about it because whether or not you are involved in their lives, they are going to grow up.

We live our lives the way we live them, we suffer through hardship and they realize that "happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, if only one remembers to turn on the light". It really helps you try to understand what it is like to be a slave in the house and sometimes they would rather work the fields. I cannot talk too much about details, you should read this play. It's about 60-70 pages long and it's a very quick read, it is phenomenal.

Ms. Jacobs really executed the dialogue in such a fashion that we are transported back to the 1860's where the story is set. The way the words are used are very casual and half the time Harriet sounds intelligent and half the time she has the standard speech of a slave who hasn't received any type of formal education because it is not allowed. The situations, and the way that Diamond introduced characters and the subtleties that forced us to infer things was incredible in the play.

This play is unique in the sense that it is based off of the only slave narrative written by a woman, so we receive a women's perspective. It is also unique because it is closely related to Diamond because her great great grandfather was enslaved and she feels as if she has a connection to properties that were once slave plantations. Also being a woman, she could write better from this perspective, as well as throwing in a love triangle.

I was surprised when I read this book because I did not know what to expect and personally I thought I was going to be bored. That was not the case at all. I was fully engaged in the text and it was funny, heartbreaking, heartwarming, hopeful, soulful, violent, historical and also connectable. Every one of the seven students that talked to Ms. Diamond that day had something different to say, and I'm sure we all had more to add but could not with the allotted time.

If you order this play, and find you have an hour or two to spare, please read it. It will change your thoughts on slavery and provide you with new insight and also a new appreciation for what you have now.

Christian Colegrove says

Ever since elementary school, we have learned about slavery. As the years went by, the intensity and the detail of the era increased. The reason why we were taught about this era for all these years in little bits is so we would be desensitized to what would happen due to the fact that this era could become very graphic and disturbing. The play, Harriet Jacobs, written by Lydia R. Diamond, is a play about the book, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Instead of learning about the horrible events that went on in the plantation life predominantly made up of African American males, the play goes into a different direction. The main focus is on the inspiration of the play, Harriet Jacobs, who lives and works in the master's house rather than working out in the plantation.

My thoughts when I first picked up this play were "Oh, just another story on slavery (Not to be taken as

racist in any way. Like I said, we have been learning about slavery ever since elementary school so the topic can become quite repetitive)." I started reading the note from the playwright, Lydia R. Diamond, which talked about the emotions and feelings that go through her when entering a new play or dealing with a topic such as slavery. Towards the end of the note, she said "When you read this play, act this play, direct or produce this play, try not to dwell only in the pain of it. Try, I think, to humbly acknowledge that we bring to it what we do, through the perspectives that we have, whether you agree that it is a slightly skewed perspective or not, and then put that aside and live in the present I've tried to create." That statement just made me think and once I started reading the play, I knew exactly what she was talking about. I felt like I was there watching the play and in some parts, actually in her (Harriet's) body. In the last paragraph of the note, Diamond says "In her book, Ms. Jacobs works to articulate to us the horrors of slavery. In my play, I work to articulate the psychological conundrum of trying to put words to that which is unspeakable..... Honor, please, the humor in this play, where there is humor."

The two quotes in the previous paragraph sums up the book in a nut shell. This is a very graphic and serious play. But you can't have a play just be depressing not leaving a good outcome, you have to have some sort of comic relief in a play like this which is the exact reason the character "Grandma" was placed in the play. Grandma is Harriet's strong-willed, well-liked, free grandmother. When Grandma is first introduced in the play, She, Tom (Harriet's somewhat boyfriend), and Harriet are in Grandma's kitchen. In this little snippet from the play, Tom is talking about Grandma's cooking at first. Tom: Those talents bought your freedom, so you keep right on thinkin' highly of them. Grandma: But long as he owns my kin, I am still under the thumb of the good Doctor Norcom. "Harriet: He can't touch you - he wouldn't dare. Don't want the town to see his true colors. Tom: Truth be told, it is your beauty, not your biscuits, brings me round. Harriet: What about my beauty? Grandma: Don' worry, I ain' gone steal yo man. Tom: I think you should worry, Harriet. Grandma lookin' good today..." I feel that she placed this character in here because of the comic relief. Grandma is not only the funny one, but she is the one who offers all the wise advice and is Harriet's guardian angel.

As time goes on in the play, Harriet becomes pregnant by a master from another plantation and she runs away from her plantation to her Grandma's shack by her house. Harriet gave birth to her children and was unable to interact with them because she was in hiding. This hiding spot was no bigger than the space under a dining room table. Just imagine the psychological pain that Harriet went through. Not being able to talk to her children, just see them grow up and play. Grandma would come up every once and a while, check on her, tell her what was going on and then go back to take care of the children. Harriet wasn't able to interact with her children for the first time until they were 7 years old. This play conveys the mental stress and all the things that went on with one person rather than a group of people. This play got inside her head and gave me a better picture of what went on.

I personally think that this play is one of the best works of literature that I have read. I would recommend it to anyone of age. What I mean by "of age" is that this book is very mature and would be to much for someone that has not built up their knowledge of the topic. I loved that this play was short and not only that, but a very quick read. Some works of literature may be short, but they drag on. I thank Harriet Jacobs for giving Lydia R. Diamond the inspiration for writing this play. I had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Diamond at the Royal House in Medford last Saturday along with a few other class mates from my US History Honors class. She is easily the nicest woman and such an inspiration. As you may know, the Royal House used to be a plantation. While walking around, Ms. Diamond was filled with different emotions because of where she was. It amazed me and just made the whole experience one of a kind. If you have the chance to pick up a copy of the book, do it. It takes less than two hours to read and you will love every second of it.
