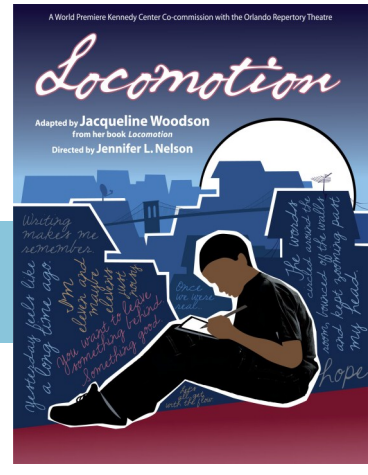


From Page to Stage: Locomotion

Friday, February 4
 Grades 6–12
 11 a.m.–12 p.m.

Curriculum Connections: Language Arts
National Standards for Theater: 1, 2 & 5



About the Program

Have you ever wondered how all the elements of a theater production come together to form the final product? Join award-winning author Jacqueline Woodson as she talks with moderator Maria Salvadore about the creation and adaptation of her book, *Locomotion*, for the stage. This new production, a Kennedy Center co-commission with Orlando Repertory Theater, is an inspiring story of the journey of an eleven-year-old African American boy as he moves from tragedy to hope, losing one family and gaining another. Additionally, through specially created Webisodes available online only, the actors and technical artists discuss their role in the creative process providing insight into this process from start to finish.

About the Book

Lonnie Collins Motion, nicknamed “Locomotion” by his mother, had his life transformed dramatically when he was placed in a foster home, apart from his beloved younger sister Lili whom he missed terribly. Lonnie struggled to cope with his complex feelings about the change in his life until his teacher showed him how to express his emotions through poetry, and by writing, Lonnie was able to find new meaning in his life.

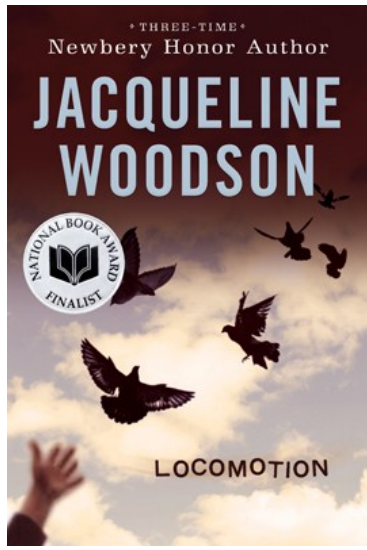
While Lonnie’s poetry caught the attention of his teacher, Ms. Woodson’s book *Locomotion* caught the attention of many critics, winning several important awards.

Meet the Playwright

When Jacqueline Woodson was in the fifth grade, she wrote a poem about Martin Luther King Jr. that was so good no one believed she actually wrote it, including her teacher. (Sound familiar? The same thing happens to Lonnie!)

Finally, everyone believed young Jacqueline authored the poem. And when it was submitted to a poetry writing contest, Jacqueline won a Scrabble game!

Ms. Woodson is an award-winning author of books for children and young adults. Go to the library and search for her books on the shelves. She currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.



A Play Based on the Book

Ms. Woodson *adapted* this stage play version of *Locomotion* from her novel of the same name. The book is actually a series of poems written by “Lonnie.” If you read the book, you’ll notice some changes. For example, an entirely new character, Enrique, was created for the stage version. Other book characters never show up in the stage adaptation at all. And Ms. Marcus and Miss Edna might seem different from how they are portrayed in the book. The reason is a story works differently onstage than it does on a page. Authors write books for a reader sitting alone. Playwrights write stories for actors to perform before a live audience. Since Ms. Woodson wrote both the book and the play, she knows the characters and her story best!

Theatrical Tricks

- *Locomotion* is a “memory play” which means scenes jump forward in time or “flash back” to the past. On stage, change happens *fast*, as quick as a memory flashes into your head. Be prepared for *transformations* on stage that happen quickly.
- The actors in *Locomotion* play more than one character. Sometimes they are younger and older versions of the same person. You’ll see actors *transform* into other people by how they speak, move, and even dress.
- The locations in *Locomotion* change, too. Watch how the stage *transforms* into different places—a classroom, a schoolyard, a house—and switches from past to present and back to past. Pay close attention to how the furniture, lights, and sounds work together to create a new time and space for all the various scenes.
- Sometimes an actor *transforms* his focus by talking directly to the audience instead of the other actors. The actor is still “in the play,” pretending the audience is not there. Often during the play, we see how Lonnie speaks in the direction of the audience, while imagining no one is there. (When an actor talks directly to the audience, it is usually *not* an invitation to talk back to the actor.)

Meet the Characters

Meet Lonnie

Something is up with this kid, Lonnie. He says his parents named him Lonnie Collins Motion—or “Lo-Co-Motion” for short. *Locomotion* was a 1962 rock and roll hit song that made his mom happy whenever she heard it. Now Lonnie lives with a foster mom and never talks about what happened to his real family. His teacher, Ms. Marcus, has everyone writing in journals. Lonnie is the only one who seems to like it. He left his journal on his desk. Inside, he had written: “Once we were real.”



Photo by Carol Pratt

(l-r) Nickolas Vaughan as Lonnie Collins Motion, G. Alvarez Reid as Enrique, Fatima Quander as Ms. Marcus

Meet Ms. Marcus

Ms. Marcus says everything changes. She says, “Fourth grade is different than first” because we’re not little kids anymore. Ms. Marcus says we change so fast she could watch it happen except she works too hard to notice. She says people change *all the time*.



Photo by Carol Pratt

Nickolas Vaughan as Lonnie Collins Motion

Meet Enrique

Enrique and Lonnie are friends because they sit together in class. Other than that, you’d never expect them to be friends because Enrique *expresses* himself by singing gospel and hip hop music, and Lonnie *expresses* himself by writing poems in his journal.



Photo by Carol Pratt

(l-r) Nickolas Vaughan as Lonnie Collins Motion, G. Alvarez Reid as Enrique



Photo by Carol Pratt

(l-r) Fatima Quander as Miss Edna, Nickolas Vaughan as Lonnie Collins Motion

Meet Miss Edna

Lonnie’s foster mom, Miss Edna, *adapts* to a new situation when she accepts a foster child in her house. “We need to figure out how this is going to work,” she says to Lonnie, “the two of us living here.” She also *adapts* to life with her own son in the military overseas. Lonnie must *adapt* to life with Miss Edna, Ms. Marcus, and Enrique. He must also *adapt* to life without his real family.

What Makes a Family?

Photo by Carol Pratt



Nickolas Vaughan as Lonnie Collins Motion,
G. Alvarez Reid as Daddy

When parents are not able to take care of their children for any reason and other family members are not available either, the state places the child in a household within the foster care system. Foster parents take care of a child's daily well-being and offer a parent's support and affection. In the play, Lonnie and his sister Lili live in separate foster homes and each must learn to *adapt* to their new surroundings.

A "traditional" family in America used to be made up of a mom, a dad, and kids. Today, "non-traditional" families are much more common and people are *adapting* to new forms of families. Children might be raised by a single mom, a single dad, or their grandparents. Several generations might live under the same roof. A lot of families are led by bi-racial couples or two moms or two dads. A family can also include adopted children, stepmothers, stepfathers, stepchildren, and half-siblings. Regardless, a family is still a close unit of loved ones under the same roof.

Instructional Activities

Express Yourself

Lonnie says "Writing makes me remember... like somebody pushed the Rewind button." He writes "free verse," a form of poetry that frees itself from rhythm and rhyme and allows words to flow on their own. Whether a poem rhymes or not, it still has to say something. Research different forms of poetry then push the rewind button on your life. Think back to a "perfect moment." Make a list of all the things in that moment and how you felt. Weave those words together into a poem using a form that strikes you. Bring your perfect moment back to life.

Roof

At night sometimes after Miss Edna goes to bed I go
up on the roof
Sometimes I sit counting the stars
Maybe one is my mama and
another one is my daddy And maybe that's why
sometimes they flicker a bit
I mean *the stars* flicker



Photo by Carol Pratt

Nickolas Vaughan as Lonnie Collins Motion

Adapt It

Read this poem from the novel *Locomotion* and imagine how you would bring it to life on stage. Describe your ideas on the page. Share your scene with your classmates and see how they vary. Then watch clips of the performance of *Locomotion* online and see how Ms. Woodson handles the same moment in her play.

Resources

Jacqueline Woodson in Print:

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Locomotion*. (Speak, New York) 2004.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Peace, Locomotion*. (Puffin, New York) 2009.

Jacqueline Woodson Online:

www.jacquelinewoodson.com

On Poetry Form:

<http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/197>

Hear more from the actors and technical artists of *Locomotion* in specially created Webisodes on the Performing Arts Series website: <http://www.kennedy-center.org/education/pwttv/>