



**Classroom Guide for**  
**IRA'S SHAKESPEARE DREAM**  
Written by **Glenda Armand**  
Illustrated by **Floyd Cooper**

### Reading Level

\*Reading Level: 4–5

Interest Level: 2–8

Guided Reading Level: R

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

### Themes

African American History, Performing Arts, Theater, Shakespeare, Slavery, New York City, Perseverance/Overcoming Obstacles, Dreams and Aspirations, Discrimination, Biography, Nonfiction, United States History, African American Interest

### Synopsis

For as long as he could remember, Ira Aldridge dreamed of performing the famous plays of William Shakespeare. Ira spent every chance he got at the theater, memorizing the actors' lines and movements for all of Shakespeare's plays. He knew he could be a great Shakespearean actor if only given the chance. But in the early 1800s, only white actors were allowed to perform Shakespeare. Ira's only option as a black actor was to perform musical numbers at the all-black theater in New York City.

Despite being discouraged by his teacher and father, Ira determinedly pursued his dream and set off to England, the land of Shakespeare. There he encountered some of the same roadblocks and discrimination he faced back home. Critics and theatergoers argued that he should not be allowed to play roles intended for white actors.

Ira honed his acting skills and eventually performed at the acclaimed Theatre Royal Haymarket. Through hard work and perseverance, Ira went on to play major roles in *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*. The young man with a dream became one of the most celebrated Shakespearean actors in the world.

Illustrated by award-winning artist Floyd Cooper, *Ira's Shakespeare Dream* is a captivating tribute to the life of Ira Aldridge, and to the enduring magic of Shakespeare's works to inspire people of all backgrounds.

## BACKGROUND

*From the Afterword:* Although Ira Frederick Aldridge never received the recognition in the United States that he earned abroad, he is considered one of the greatest Shakespearean actors of the nineteenth century. Aldridge was born in 1807 in New York City at a time when most African Americans were still enslaved throughout the United States. He was the first black actor to portray Othello on the English stage. He was also a vocal and generous supporter of the abolitionist movement in the United States.

Aldridge received numerous awards during his lifetime. He died in 1867 at the age of sixty, in Lodz, Poland, and memorials to his work can be found throughout the world. But perhaps the greatest honor bestowed upon Aldridge's legacy is a bronze plaque inscribed with his name at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, at Stratford-upon-Avon, England, the birthplace of William Shakespeare. Ira Frederick Aldridge is the only African American among the thirty-three actors to have received this recognition.

*Global Racism and Slavery in the Eighteenth Century:* During Ira Aldridge's lifetime, worldwide attitudes about race, racism, and slavery were evolving. Many countries in the Americas had institutionalized slavery throughout the 1800s, while the Northern US states and Europe began to abolish slavery in the second half of the 1700s and stopped participating in the slave trade. In 1807, the British Parliament made it illegal for British ships to transport slaves, and in 1833, the British abolished slavery. All slavery was banned in the United States in 1865. But even with the abolition of slavery and the slave trade, segregation, discrimination, and inequality continued to be widespread in attitudes and law. Discover more significant slavery and abolition events from [The Abolition of the Slave Trade timeline](#)<sup>1</sup> by the New York Public Library and [Free the Slaves timeline](#).<sup>2</sup>

*William Shakespeare and His Works:* According to the Folger Shakespeare Library, William Shakespeare wrote [at least 38 plays and more than 150 poems](#).<sup>3</sup> The date traditionally given for Shakespeare's birth is [April 23, 1564](#).<sup>4</sup> He grew up and had a family in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, but worked in London, "the center of English theater." Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616. There is [no record](#) of his ever attending a university. Some have questioned whether or not Shakespeare is the true author of all the works accredited to him, but no decisive evidence has been found to prove that anyone else was the (or an) author.<sup>5</sup>

*Othello: The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* was first performed on November 1, 1604. It is still often performed today. Students unfamiliar with the play can read about its characters and themes at [LitCharts](#)<sup>6</sup> and listen to an [excerpt from Othello](#) performed by the Folger Shakespeare Library.<sup>7</sup> Folger Digital Texts also provides free, downloadable texts of Shakespeare's plays, including [Othello](#),<sup>8</sup> and digitized early

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<sup>1</sup> <http://abolition.nypl.org/timeline/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.freetheslaves.net/about-slavery/slavery-in-history/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.folger.edu/shakespeares-works>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.folger.edu/shakespeares-life>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-faq>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.litcharts.com/lit/othello>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.folger.edu/othello-audio-edition>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/?chapter=5&play=Oth&loc=p7>

images representing Shakespeare's plays, including a [picture of Ira Aldridge as Othello in 1854](#).<sup>9</sup>

*Shakespeare and Black Actors*: Although Ira Aldridge broke many barriers for black actors in the nineteenth century, there is a long history of discrimination and racism in the theater. To the present day, actors, directors, patrons, audiences, journalists, critics, and academics have been deeply divided over the inclusion and participation of African Americans in performing and interpreting Shakespeare's works. In 1997, one hundred thirty years after Aldridge's death, David Harewood became the first black actor to play Othello at London's National Theatre. Students may watch David Harewood discuss the play and his role in an [episode](#)<sup>10</sup> of the PBS "[Shakespeare Uncovered](#)" series.<sup>11</sup> The PBS episode explores the history of the play, Ira Aldridge's legacy, and evolving views of race and racism. To further explore the complex relationship of Shakespeare and race, check out the free Shakespeare Unlimited podcast episodes, "[Shakespeare in Black and White](#)" (Episode 19)<sup>12</sup> and "[African Americans and Shakespeare](#)" (Episode 20)<sup>13</sup> from the Folger Shakespeare Library.

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Before introducing the book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. Take a look at the front and back covers. Take a picture walk. Ask students to make a prediction. Do you think this book will be fiction or nonfiction? What makes you think so? What clues do the author and illustrator give to help you know whether this book will be fiction or nonfiction?
2. What do you know about texts that are biographies? What are some typical features of biographies? What are some things that will not happen in biographies? Why do authors write biographical stories? How do you think their reasons differ from authors who write fiction?
3. What does an actor do? What are some types of performances with which you are familiar (movies, plays, musicals)? Have you ever seen a play? Why do you think people might like plays? Share a memory you have of going to a play or movie.
4. What do you know about William Shakespeare and his plays? Why do you think his works are still so popular today?
5. What is *persistence*? Share a time you demonstrated persistence. What was your goal? What challenges did you face? Who helped you along the way in achieving your goal? How did you stay motivated?
6. What do you know about the early 1800s in the United States? What were the social, political, or economic conditions of African Americans during this time? What do you know about slavery in the United States? Why might African Americans in the early 1800s want to live, study, and work in New York City rather than the South? What other texts have you read that discuss or involve slavery?
7. Why do you think I chose this book for us to read today?

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.folger.edu/othello>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/shakespeare-uncovered/uncategorized/othello-david-harewood-full-episode/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/shakespeare-uncovered/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited-episode-19>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited-episode-20>

**Exploring the Book**

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Read and talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think the title, *Ira's Shakespeare Dream*, means. Then ask them what they think this book will most likely be about and who the book might be about. What situations and places might be talked about in the text? What do you think might happen? What information do you think you might learn? What makes you think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, acknowledgement, author's note, dedications, illustrations, Ira Aldridge's photograph and afterword, and author's sources.

**Setting a Purpose for Reading**

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- who Ira Aldridge is.
- what and who inspires Ira Aldridge to pursue his love of acting.
- about the obstacles he faces.
- how he overcomes these obstacles.
- to what the title, *Ira's Shakespeare Dream*, refers.

Have students also read to determine how the text is structured and how the information is presented. Encourage students to consider why the author, Glenda Armand, would want to share this story with young people.

**VOCABULARY**

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

**CONTENT SPECIFIC**

Park Theatre	Shakespeare	African Free School	<i>Hamlet</i>	final curtain
waterfront	balcony	velvet curtains	colored boy	African Grove
cargo ship	cabin boy	port	slave trader	slavery ministry
auction block	stagestruck	stagehands	auditioned	understudy
cobblestone	play the lead	valet	native country	theatergoers
Jewish	born free	abolitionists	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	
<i>Othello</i>	bowed	standing ovation	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	
Theatre Royal Haymarket				

**ACADEMIC**

magnificent	spellbound	grand entrance	barreled	paced
melodic	playacting	beaming with pride	wares	foolishness
gaze	voyage	spared	helplessly	agony
scolding	errands	enrolled	befriended	tearfully

critics	discouraged	variety	portray	plight
injustice	recounted	cruelties	satisfied	enslaved
fame	fortune	despair	regret	tragic/tragedy
admirers	stirring	adoring		

Note: These lines from Shakespeare's plays are also found within the text.

"This above all,— To thine own self be true. . . ." —*Hamlet*

"To be, or not to be: that is the question—" —*Hamlet*

"Parting is such sweet sorrow." —*Romeo and Juliet*

"If you prick us do we not bleed? / If you tickle us do we not laugh?" —*The Merchant of Venice*

"When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, / Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, / . . . Then must you speak / Of one that loved not wisely but too well."  
—*Othello*

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.**

<b>Literal Comprehension</b>
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(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

1. Why does Ira "beam with pride" in Mr. Andrews' classroom?
2. What does Mr. Andrews think of Ira's dream of performing Shakespeare at the Park Theatre? Why does he think this? What does Ira's father think about Ira's dream of becoming an actor? Why does he think this?
3. Why do Mr. Andrews and Ira's father think teaching and preaching are better goals for Ira than his dream to be an actor?
4. How does Ira feel about almost being sold into slavery and seeing other people sold into slavery?
5. What challenges (large and small) does Ira tackle on his way to becoming a professional Shakespearean actor?
6. Why does New York City have an all-white theater (the Park Theatre) and an all-black theater (the African Grove)? Why does Ira have to sit on the balcony at the Park, but can sit anywhere he wants to at the African Grove?
7. What aspects of acting are interesting and exciting to Ira? What characteristics of acting, theater, and Shakespeare are appealing to him?
8. What words would you use to describe Ira Aldridge? Describe how he demonstrates persistence, optimism, ambition, and/or enthusiasm.
9. What does Ira do to avoid his father finding out about his time spent thinking about, watching, and exploring acting?
10. Ira faces quite a few detractors in his pursuit of acting, but he has several supporters too. List people who are helpers, fans, or advocates of Ira. Alongside each name, write a sentence or two describing how the person helps Ira achieve his goal.
11. How does Ira find out about opportunities in England?
12. How does Ira finally know he has been recognized as a Shakespearean actor?
13. Is this book a primary or secondary source? How do you know?

**Extension/Higher Level Thinking**

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 3, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

1. Why does Mr. Andrews encourage Ira to pursue being a teacher instead of an actor?
2. What clues does the author, Glenda Armand, give readers to demonstrate how Ira's father feels about Ira's dream to become an actor?
3. Why does Ira's brother, Joshua, encourage Ira to go to South Carolina as a cabin boy? What does he mean by "you need an adventure"?
4. In encouraging Ira not to give up on acting, Joshua is disobeying their father's rules and expectations for Ira. Is it ever appropriate or acceptable to disobey someone's parents or guardians? Why or why not? Why do you think Joshua encourages Ira to disobey their father? Do you think Joshua did the right thing? Why or why not?
5. Joshua warns Ira that "things are different down South." What does he mean? Compare life for African Americans in New York City and South Carolina during the first half of the nineteenth century. What advantages does Ira have as an African American living in New York City that he wouldn't have in the South?
6. Why is Ira's trip to South Carolina significant? How does the experience change his life and perspective?
7. Why does Ira decide to go to England to become an actor and not just stay in New York City? What limitations does he face in the United States? What limitations and opportunities does he face in England? How are England and the United States different at this time in their treatment of and opportunities afforded to African American actors?
8. Do you think Ira disappointed his father? Why or why not? Although Ira's father never got to see Ira perform as a professional actor, do you think he would have been proud of his adult son? Why or why not?
9. Do you think Ira's father wants what is best for Ira or not? Joshua and his father give very different advice to Ira. Can Joshua and Ira's father both want what is best for Ira? Explain how this might happen?
10. How do you think Ira's father feels when he learns Ira is not going to school? How do you think he feels when he finds Ira's letter and discovers that his son has left for England?
11. How does theater change Ira's life? How does Ira change after arriving in England?
12. Read or refer students to the Author's Note at the beginning of the book. Why would the author include this note? Which parts of the story do you think the author imagined or dramatized? Why do you think she would want to or needed to include "dramatic extensions" and "imagined scenes" alongside the historical events and facts? What effect do these scenes have on the text? How do these additions help readers better understand Ira Aldridge?
13. Read the bio for illustrator Floyd Cooper on the book jacket, which includes information about how he creates his illustrations. What mood and effect do the illustrations evoke? Why might Floyd Cooper want to have illustrations that look like old photographs?
14. Why is portraying Shylock in the play, *The Merchant of Venice*, personally meaningful for Ira?
15. Compare the story with the additional text at the end of the book. How is narrative nonfiction similar to and different from informational nonfiction? Why might the author, Glenda Armand, chose to tell Ira Aldridge's early life as a narrative?
16. Ira is both an American and an African American in Europe as he pursues and succeeds in a career as a professional Shakespearean actor. Would being an outsider add to Ira's success or detract from it? What additional challenges would Ira face as an outsider? How does being an outsider give him a different perspective?

from other actors to bring to his roles? How might his experiences influence his interpretations and connections to the roles and plays?

17. Explain how geography affects Ira Aldridge's life and opportunities. Think about what is happening during Ira's lifetime in New York versus the South in the United States versus England and the rest of Europe. If Ira had been born in South Carolina, would he have been able to pursue acting? Why or why not? Would Ira have achieved success if he stayed in New York City instead of moving to London, England? Why or why not?

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1 and 2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Ira Aldridge had a big dream to one day be a Shakespearean actor. What dream do you have? What will you need to do to achieve your dream? Why is it helpful to study people who have worked hard and achieved their dreams?
2. In this book, the theater has the powerful effect of helping Ira feel inspired, hopeful, and enthusiastic. Describe a time you felt inspired or enthusiastic and what made you feel that way. How has enjoying art (of any kind) or expressing yourself through art helped you think about your feelings and interests?
3. Ira has several people who influenced and supported him and helped him achieve success as a global actor. Write about someone in your life who helps, encourages, or practices with you and a time this person made a difference in helping you achieve a goal. How does this person make you feel? How has this person helped you overcome your fears or obstacles along the way? Do you think everyone needs someone who believes in him or her? Why or why not?
4. Do you think Ira could have done anything to change his father's mind about acting? Why or why not? Write about a time you have tried to change an adult's mind about something. Were you successful? What advice do you have for Ira to help his father understand why acting is so important to him?

### ELL/ESL Teaching Strategies

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the book with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the text. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the book or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.

4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about Ira Aldridge, what the author's message in the book is, or what goal or dream they have of their own.
5. The story contains some content-specific words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Student who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1 and 2, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Pair *Ira's Shakespeare Dream* with the primary source document, "[What to the Slave is the Fourth of July](#)," by Frederick Douglass (1852).<sup>14</sup> EDSITEMent, from the National Endowment for the Humanities, has prepared a [lesson plan](#) for this speech including questions and historical context.<sup>15</sup>
2. Ira visits South Carolina in the text. African Americans in the New York City and South Carolina had many different experiences and opportunities in the nineteenth century. Pair *Ira's Shakespeare Dream* with [Etched in Clay: The Life of Dave, Enslaved Potter and Poet](#).<sup>16</sup> Have students compare the lives of Ira Aldridge and Dave the Potter. Using a Venn diagram, encourage students to explore how each man used art to express himself, the rights and privileges they had (in their states and in the United States in general), their level of education, and their ability to make choices about their lives. Create a timeline for this period with events and moments from Ira Aldridge's and Dave the Potter's lives and careers along with major national events such as the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln's election, and the Emancipation Proclamation. Use different colors to designate Ira's and Dave's events.
3. Have students investigate the role of African Americans in theater/on-stage performing. In an essay, describe who some famous African American actors are and how African Americans have been treated in the acting community. What challenges have African Americans faced due to the color of their skin? How has theater, and acting in general, opened opportunities for African Americans and others? What contributions have they made to theater? As a case study, have students compare the life and legacy of another significant [Othello](#)<sup>17</sup> actor, [Paul Robeson](#),<sup>18</sup> to Ira Aldridge.
4. Have students learn more about London, England, during Ira Aldridge's lifetime. Make a chart with the topics: *Transportation, Entertainment, Jobs, Clothing, and People*. What was the city like? What types of entertainment were popular? What

<sup>14</sup> <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://edsitement.neh.gov/launchpad-frederick-douglass-what-slave-fourth-july>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2815>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/tri203.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2703>

were common jobs and occupations? Where did people live? How were different groups of people treated? Have students record appropriate information as they research.

5. Provide students with a world map. (An outline of a Robinson projection world map can be downloaded [here](#) for reproduction).<sup>19</sup> Help students identify and label the places featured in the book: the countries of England and the United States and the cities of London and New York. Students should label the ocean separating England from the United States. Encourage students to mark their location on the map. Discuss what a compass rose is and the purpose it serves on a map. Students may also build their own maps at [National Geographic Education's MapMaker 1-Page Maps](#).<sup>20</sup>

### English Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)  
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1 and 2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4)

1. Have students compare and contrast this biography of Ira Aldridge with other biographies of performers, such as:

- [Baby Flo: Florence Mills Lights Up the Stage](#)<sup>21</sup>
- [Knockin' On Wood: Starring Peg Leg Bates](#)<sup>22</sup>
- [Little Melba and Her Big Trombone](#)<sup>23</sup>
- [Shining Star: The Anna May Wong Story](#)<sup>24</sup>

How are these performers' experiences similar? How does a clear goal help each of them conquer hardship along the way? What character traits do they share that allow them to overcome obstacles? What legacies have they left behind? Who are their role models or biggest champions of their success, if any? Have students first compare the similarities and differences of each book in a Venn diagram and then formalize in an essay presenting the similarities and differences.

2. Ask students to compare the narrative nonfiction of the book to the informational text included at the end of the book (Afterword). In a [T-chart](#), have students examine both versions of Ira's life.<sup>25</sup> List the qualities of each text nonfiction that prove it's nonfiction. What characteristics make one text narrative or literary nonfiction and the other informational nonfiction. In your opinion, write which nonfiction text is more effective in learning about Ira Aldridge and why.

### Writing

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4)

1. Ira does not return to the United States before his father dies in 1840. Imagine you are Ira's father and are writing a letter to Ira who is in England. In your letter, tell Ira how you feel about his dream to become a Shakespearean actor and how you have changed or not changed your mind. Do you think Ira's father would have been proud, disappointed, angry, hurt, or understanding in this letter to his son? Do you think Ira's father would have understood why his son might not have been able to return or did not want to return?
2. Encourage students to write a letter as Ira to either his father or Mr. Andrews. Explain why you want to become an actor and what support you are or are not

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.worksheetworks.com/geography/world/robinson.html>

<sup>20</sup> <http://education.nationalgeographic.com/mapping/outline-map/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2767>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2419>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2854>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2706>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/chart-30225.html>

getting from theater audiences and other actors. Describe your abilities, what makes acting and theaters rewarding for you, and how your role as a minority in the world of Shakespeare is important.

3. Have students write a blog post or a letter to the editor exploring how today's world is different from and/or similar to Ira's. Students should take a position whether people of different races treat one another better today and why they think so. Are people treated equally nowadays, or do you see evidence of unfair treatment around you? If people are being treated unfairly, what part could you play in changing things?
4. Ask students to imagine they have seen one of Ira's performances. Have them write a review of his performance. Students may wish to study examples of theater and movie reviews in newspapers or online for inspiration.

### Arts/Performing Arts

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4 and 6)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 1 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 5)

(Language Standards, Conventions of Standard English, Strand 1 and Knowledge of Language, Strand 3)

1. Using just the Shakespeare lines quoted in *Ira's Shakespeare Dream* or the full passages from which these lines are taken, have students memorize and present them to the class. Students can explore the context of these lines in the larger works: [Hamlet](#),<sup>26</sup> [Romeo and Juliet](#),<sup>27</sup> [Othello](#),<sup>28</sup> and [The Merchant of Venice](#).<sup>29</sup> Search for the specific lines in the digital works by using the keyboard shortcut: Ctrl+F/Cmd+F. Check out strategies on how to "[transform your classroom into the Globe Theater](#)"<sup>30</sup> and more from the [Classroom Bookshelf blog](#).<sup>31</sup>
2. Turn *Ira's Shakespeare Dream* into a [reader's theater script](#) for students to perform.<sup>32</sup> Characters include: Ira, his father, Mr. Andrews, Joshua, the ship captain, the slave dealer, and James and Henry Wallack. Encourage broad student participation by creating multiple narrators, having the whole class speak Ira's Shakespeare lines together, and preparing short lines for the theatergoers and critics reactions.
3. Invite an actor or a director from a high school, local college, or community theater program to your classroom. Before the visit, encourage students to brainstorm questions to ask this person about theater and acting. How can someone become an actor? What kind of training do actors need? What are some responsibilities actors have? What challenges has this person faced (discrimination, lack of encouragement, low self-esteem, lack of resources, etc.) in the pursuit of her or his goal? How has this person persisted? What are the differences among acting in theater, film, and television?
4. Encourage students to design and create a poster advertising one of Ira's Shakespeare performances. Imagine Ira was making his first tour as a Shakespearean actor in the United States. Persuade American audiences to attend his shows based on facts found in the book and other sources.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/?chapter=5&play=Ham&loc=p7>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/?chapter=5&play=Rom&loc=p7>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/?chapter=5&play=Oth&loc=p7>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/?chapter=5&play=MV&loc=p7>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.classroombookshelf.blogspot.com/2015/05/iras-shakespeare-dream.html>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.classroombookshelf.blogspot.com/>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/readers-theater-giving-students-reason-read-aloud>

**Home-School Connection**

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7 and 8)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Encourage students to interview their parents, grandparents, or guardians. Ask them to describe a time when they performed in front of a large crowd. What activity were they doing (sports, art, music, theater, comedy, debate, dance, etc.)? How did they prepare and practice? Who helped them practice? How did their families feel when they performed this activity? How did they themselves feel about the whole experience? Have students write down their interviewee's answers to bring to class. Ask students to reflect on these answers and write what they learned from this interview.
2. Ask students to interview their parents, grandparents, or guardians. When was there a time they experienced prejudice or witnessed prejudice toward someone else? How did it make them feel? How did they overcome or manage that obstacle? What changes have they seen since they were younger or hope to see in the future to make the world a fairer, more just place? Have students write down their interviewee's answers to bring to class. Ask students to reflect on these answers and write what they learned from this interview.
3. Invite students to research a theater actor (past or present) from their community, city, or state. In which plays has this actor performed? What challenges has this actor faced? Create a timeline of major events in the actor's life and career. Using a Venn diagram, compare and contrast the artist's life and career with Ira Aldridge's.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Glenda Armand** is the author of *Love Twelve Miles Long*, a recipient of Lee & Low's New Voices Award in 2006. A former teacher and librarian, Armand loves reading about history and is passionate about sharing accounts of little-known African American trailblazers. Her hope is that these stories will inspire new generations of young dreamers to persevere despite any obstacles they may face. Armand lives in Los Angeles, California. Visit her online at [Glenda-armand.com](http://Glenda-armand.com).

**ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR**

**Floyd Cooper** is an award-winning illustrator who has been recognized with three Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honors and the Illustrator Award for *The Blacker the Berry*. Born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Cooper received a degree in fine arts from the University of Oklahoma. In 1984 he came to New York City to pursue a career in illustration. Cooper is known for his unique artistic technique that involves erasing oil washes from boards to create images. He now lives in Easton, Pennsylvania, with his family. Visit him online at [floydcooper.com](http://floydcooper.com).

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please contact us at [general@leeandlow.com](mailto:general@leeandlow.com)